UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA
39001005972719

UNDER THE RED ENSIGN

H. M. TOMLINSON

UNDER THE RED ENSIGN

UNDER THE RED ENSIGN

VK
57
T4
1926

BY

H. M. TOMLINSON

LONDON
WILLIAMS AND NORGATE, LTD.
14 HENRIETTA STREET, COVENT GARDEN, W.C. 2
1926

Printed in Great Britain

TO

E. A. T.

UNDER THE RED ENSIGN

CHAPTER I

"I MUST go down to the seas again, to the lonely sea and the sky." We know what that means. It means leaving the warm centre of the city, parting from the friendly devices which protect visiting fools and the ignorant, and going with a hand-bag at dusk down through moping waterside streets, which we have never seen before, to board a ship of which we know nothing. It is not exhilarating. I do not like it, and never shall. The Open Road, as it is called, looks very well in books. But you rarely find it open. There are swing-bridges. There is glum water where you never expected it to be. There is a ship —there are many ships—but not your ship. Yours, if it exists, is on the other side of the dock. Go round that warehouse, down the

flight of steps over which you will see a bracket gas-lamp, bear to the left past the "Steam Packet" Tavern, and cross the lock-gates. Then ask again.

But ask whom? Those shadows at the corners? Sailing time is near, night has come, the city is distant and its sounds are but echoes; and all this stuff about quays and Long John Silver is rosy only when seen in a theatre. The reality is nothing like it. Besides, John Silver does not frequent the quays; not in these days. He has learned much since he ended his business with Stevenson. He knows an easier way to the treasure than all the fuss with stockades and muskets against competitors who also are after the doubloons. His present chart is a company prospectus, but with no clue worth mentioning. We shall not meet him here.

I crossed the lock-gates. There was no rain, but a wind. I could not see the water but I could hear it. And when at last I found the right loading shed, the wind was swinging on it a loose sheet of iron that had a song of two sad notes. One lamp showed a brief area of cobbles outside. Within the nebulous hollow

of the shed a few men were trundling goods on trolleys. They went through an opening on the far side; beyond the opening was a brief section of a steamer's flank, the loud voice of an unseen man, and the intermittent downfall of a derrick's cable.

I went up the gangway of the ship into a smell. It was in fact a blend of smells—of beer, hot engine-oil, steam, straw, and wet iron. You may get to like this smell and its many varieties. The ship is all right when you have found her. I sniffed this one, whose name then I did not know, yet felt sure I should know her language. Her voyage was to be very brief, no more than from an hour the right side of midnight to the middle of next day. What I did not like about her was my four-berth cabin. There was nothing nearer privacy than that, and just about room on the floor for my hand-bag amid alien properties. My fellow-passengers were not there. They were represented by hats, coats, and a bag of golf-clubs.

I withdrew to the top side of the ship, and on the way a steward stood in the attitude of crucifixion, eyes downcast and arms outspread against a bulkhead, to let me pass in the narrow

way. Several dingy figures drooped in ulsters on the benches of the small smoking-saloon, apparently resigned to the worst, and merely waiting for it to begin. A young lady entered in a leopard skin and yellow top-boots, her lips remarkably ripe for a face of such featureless pallor, surveyed us disdainfully, and left.

Nothing more happened for a while. Outside the wind was grumbling through the funnel guys. Beyond the ship a fleet of shards of light expanded and diminished on the black water of the dock. There was still the abrupt eagerness of the crane, and far away in the city flickered a green and crimson sky-sign, "Bring up your Baby on Brasso," as near as I could read it, for the green version was imperfect and the red one was dim. And there was a multitude of lower stars. One set of them, on the level of the ship, went on, perhaps to the Milky Way, in an undeviating line of diminishing planets. They remained staring at intervals apart so regular that nobody could dispute design in their existence. They were there for some purpose. But what did they illuminate? For they seemed, like works of true art or the guiding principles of a Cabinet Minister, to

exist for themselves alone, to be unrelated. They were fixed in night on a mysterious will which could never bend. There were other stars, clustered or separate, some fixed, some occulting. It was a foreign darkness and its glims, with no more reason in it than one should expect to find in the dark. Perhaps so the universe of stars will look to us on the night when our spirits, free at last, shall depart never to return to the place which knew them, where it was warm and familiar. What next ?

The crane ceased its uproar. The ship seemed to be waiting for something. Impatiently she gave a bellow. There was no answer. The stars around us remained silent and staring. Then I noticed that the mainmast was moving slowly across the red and green sky-sign. The quay lamps began to glide past. Somewhere the ship had an immense heart. It was beating heavily. Great shadows loomed in the night beside us and over us, but what they were there was no guessing ; monstrous gibbets, unlighted prisons, spectres of other ships, windows illuminated in nothing, roofs and chimneys resting on a common mystery. Once an awful liner appeared for a minute beside us.

But as she made no sound she may have had no reality, like the rest of the dream. Her array of black funnels beyond her tiers of pale upper works made our steamer below her not ridiculous, but comprehensible. We stared at her in wonder. For what contingent, to what other night of stars would that craft set out? Would she cross, not this world's equator, which would be nothing to her, but the belt of great Orion?

The many lights about us grew more scattered. We went into night, beyond the last of that undeviating line of planets. That line was finite, after all. There was, in a few hours, only darkness that had a solitary eye ahead, which winked at us. Our ship steered for that. Nothing else was left for which to steer.

The wind increased in force. The rigging was singing a loud chorus. The ship made deep courtesies to that distant solitary eye. Spray hissed past a glow-lamp on deck. The deck was cheerless, for there was nothing there but a voice, to be heard at times somewhere up towards the funnel; that murmuring voice and bursts of spray. Even the smoke-room was deserted, except for a cat, which was coiled on a

settee near an abandoned cap. I went below, through a corridor where all the white doors were shut. It was necessary to grasp the hand-rail at times and wait for a level deck. When I opened the door of my cabin the light was on, and a sudden lurch of the ship took charge of the door, which bumped into something within; one of my fellow-passengers. He was on his hands and knees, in his shirt and drawers, trailing his trousers beside him. He had been bending, back to the door, when it was opened, and there could be no doubt about the glare of his upturned eye as I bent over him and apologised. He rose, bringing with him that look of hatred, but then stooped again to his bunk, under which he fumbled. For what weapon? He brought it out. "Have just a wee dram before ye turn in," he said, and withdrew the cork with his teeth.

I had an idea all night that sleep would not come; but that did not matter, I persuaded myself, for the best thing to do when Hypnos is unfriendly is to tell him he is not wanted. The cabin was dark, except for a glimmer at the top of the partition. The regular pulse of that heart beating deeply within her was very

tranquillising. Power was there. The bunk sank under me; the beating at once took a harder and deeper note. The bed rose, and the rhythm became lighter and more rapid. Once it stopped, and I had to wonder why . . .

What astonished me was to find the port window suddenly light, the cabin fixings pale, and the huddled figures in the opposite bunks almost plain. The night, after all, had been brief. The world outside, which at times swelled to shroud the portlight, did not look like dawn. The sea has no dawn in a gale. Morning, then, is as old and dim as the end of all.

By breakfast-time land had appeared on the starboard beam, and the ship was easier under its lee. The phasmal coast came nearer, and we could see the toy-like smoke of an early train. A gull was near us, balancing to the rolling of a fairway buoy. We began to run past other steamers, that were outward bound. They were stiffly inclined from the gale, which was not spent, and an old surprise returned that in so bleak and early, so boisterous and strange an outer world, there were venturers who were busy already. Where were they going?

The British city towards which we were heading was doubtless something like the one we left the night before. We saw the gibbets again, but now they were plain as gigantic cranes above forests of poles on muddy foreshores. Those forests were the wombs of iron ships. Unborn hulls were encaved there. Once we saw a ship that was delivered. She was anchored in the stream, new and beautiful, and ready for adventures. The glum indeterminate buildings ahead, steeples and stacks, came towards us, closed in, towered over us, and we stopped.

We did not stop, however, so easily as that. It was necessary for a young officer, in oilskins and muffler, his face red and polished with spray and the edges of his eyes raw, to push brusquely through us to address a quiet word or two to the business, as the ship sidled for her berth between two other steamers.

We left her, and were soon amid the central trams and shops of a city, where vanity-bags and the latest costumes were behind plate-glass. There you would never guess that ships and the sea were anywhere near, that those thronged streets were founded on deep waters. That

city, like the one from which we had come, is kept alive by the tides of the ocean. It is, like all the shoreward cities of our islands, revived each day, or it would perish. Yet how surprised is a townsman, and a little bewildered, when he leaves his accustomed central streets, goes down to that dreary littoral of his own place, hitherto unguessed, or at most is a sensational report of what is squalid and evil, where Arabs and Chinamen keep shops which we know as dens, and there discovers that the sea, after all, was always at his very door. It is not far away, the limit of that communal and civilised life which seems so well established that we are inclined to think it is eternal. We live dangerously, but we do not know it; for between the boundary of our better parish and the sea there are interposed those repellent cobbles, always rude and muddy, the doubtful shadows under the bracket lamps of grim walls, the quays and docks so placed that their design might have been to mystify us, and the strange people who, from all one hears reported of them, might not be British at all, but our sullen enemies; streets and ways strange and inimical, where

an unresolved mass of unlighted poverty stands on the verge of the polite but nervous commune with its wealth and culture, like a threat, like an ominous cloud charged with unguessed storm.

CHAPTER II

THERE is a story in our school books which won my simple admiration. It is about a strange character whose name was Samuel Plimsoll. Samuel thought it wicked of the rich to make the sea still more terrible for poor men. He denounced a desire for profit so inordinate that ships could not float with it but took their crews to the bottom. He thought the lives of men were more important than cargoes, and his vehemence so scared in the House of Commons the traditional defenders of that human right to do what we like with our own that they agreed not to allow ships to be overloaded any more.

Plimsoll's name, therefore, became one of our household words. Nearly everybody knows the story of that fanatic. But they do not know that not long before the war the work of Plimsoll was undone by one of their most popular politicians, without a debate in Parliament, or a protest of sufficient consequence from

any quarter to draw our eyes to a cynical reversion. It was not reported in the press. There was not the usual emphatic protest, it is curious to note, from the official representatives of the sailors and firemen, though at least one of them had a seat in the House. The public never knew what had been done, and so never read into the consequent reports of ships and men that were lost more than the blind ordering of fate. Yet it was not that. It was only that a popular minister had made it possible for some shipowners to overload their ships again. It was not, of course, called overloading. It was called a Remeasuring Order. Beyond sinking some ships which should not have been "remeasured," and making many others so unseaworthy that they were dangerous in heavy weather, this order, incidentally, increased the earning power of the capital of the shipowners. By a stroke of the pen their money became more. There was no public outcry, no remorseful alteration of the school books; for the mysteries of capital, commerce, navigation, and seamanship are not attractive mysteries, as are spiritualism and night clubs.

We can easily imagine how very dangerous it would be for yet another popular public servant, for the Minister for Foreign Affairs, whichever one was in office, to interfere with the racing of horses ; that would end his career as a democratic leader. But there is never any attention paid to him, except in reverence so solemn and uncritical that it is like the quietude in a church, while he is monkeying with the controls of life and death.

These odd facts, startling in their profound implications when the subject is the health of the democracy, occurred to me all too late. I was already at the beginning of a journey to discover how the Red Ensign is now flying among the broken fortunes of Europe. Once upon a time the task would have been absurdly easy and pleasant. Our symbol then, naturally, was bravely aloft. The report upon it could have been written without any journey, experience, or knowledge whatever, as romantic history is written about kings, battles, and triumphant victories. The lush and romantic story of the Red Ensign would have been as sure of a welcome in those days as a circus. All was well. But I wondered, at the very beginning of this

journey round our seaports, whether or not I was on a foolish quest, for it might not be possible to make that flag float out as proudly as of yore. Then my journey would be wasted. Suppose I could not introduce the brave music of the "Bay of Biscay O" at the critical moment!

I remembered, for one thing, that the foreshore of England is a region not well known. It is as good as unexplored country to any sensational story-teller who desires his realistic effects to pass unquestioned. England, we know, is a maritime nation; the English a race of seafarers; London is the greatest seaport in the world. That is all very fine. Nobody ever doubts it. But those brave phrases to a farm labourer in Wiltshire, a clerk in Islington, or an ironworker in the Black Country, may be judged to rouse in each the same warm emotion given by a hint of a change in the Cabinet. They are good fellows. They so readily accept any suggestion which is deemed to be timeful and useful by those who know the right suggestions to publish, and why they should be published, and with what solemnity of insistence. Those suggestions are accepted, as are wet days, a call to the colours, a return to the gold standard, the

need for longer hours and less wages, the sack, and the tail end of the queue waiting for bread. We do not ask what the gold standard is, nor whether we are more a nation of seafarers than of plumbers. There in our school books such phrases are, with robust stories of Drake and of British victories in many sea-fights. The patriotic idea becomes as well-understood and as safely established as a religious mystery. It is the late certainty of this which has driven many observers, who once discussed liberty as though it were not a figment but a benefit to be won by resolute intelligence, and who once supposed that mechanical inventions and more money and expanding trade meant progress, to doubt whether democracy will ever be able to control its affairs with more certainty than the fish control the tides ; a doubt which falls upon them with just the gloom that might follow the veiling of the face of God.

London, though it is the greatest of the sea-ports of a maritime nation, and though the tides move as regularly past its Fleet Street printing offices as past Land's End, does not appear to be that from its popular press. Anything east of Aldgate Pump is Ultima Thule to Fleet Street.

"Lloyd's," for example, is a name as familiar in Hong-Kong as in New York. It is one of London's famous symbols. Yet when recently it was announced that the Corporation of Lloyd's was moving from the Royal Exchange to Leadenhall Street, but one London newspaper noted with interest that Lloyd's new home would be on the site of East India House, and that there till recently the Hudson's Bay Company had its headquarters. What are landmarks and symbols? One London evening paper celebrated the visit of the King to lay the foundation-stone of Lloyd's with a leading article on the theme of "A1 at Lloyd's," apparently unaware that Lloyd's Registry, which surveys and classifies ships, with its noteworthy establishment in Fenchurch Street, is an institution distinct from the meeting-place of the underwriters. There are as many books about London as there are about all the famous cities of Italy, but they make very little light for us. Anyhow, there is never any sea in the picture. No ships are there. There are the local train services, the theatres, the restaurants, and the show places. London's history and traditions might not be under our feet, and its life not seaward. Yet are there any Londoners?

Or are the unmanageable millions of us agglomerated with bricks merely of listless immigrants who are past caring now for anything except that, like the starling, we "can't get out"? Perhaps if either Liverpool or Glasgow had been the origin of the name of Lloyd, which is understood wherever there are ships, and if either had been the birthplace of those bodies of merchant adventurers that arose out of Elizabethan enterprise overseas, and gave the Red Ensign its significance, and ultimately resulted in Wembley, we should be reminded of it now and then. But London is too big to know what gives life to its body. It has not heard that for a revelation of what is meant by Empire it would be safe to put the neighbourhood of Silvertown against all the late wonders of Wembley. So a dubiety over my journey was natural. It is all very well to write a story of a voyage up the Congo to the Central African forest and its dwarfs. We should understand that. But who could get daylight on a voyage round modern England?

CHAPTER III

THE magic bean which, to Jack's surprise, grew to a vine that was lost in the clouds, and all in a night, cannot be compared with the growth which covered England as a consequence of a few bright ideas that germinated out of the eighteenth century; which covered Europe, in fact, with a perplexing, intricate, yet, as now we know, a delicate life. That delicate organism had the axe of the war laid to its roots. In great sections it was severed so that its circulation of life bled and fouled. In continental areas we see its ramifications parched and withered. They show no sign of returning vigour, and yet the old supposition of statesmen and political economists was that Europe's perennial freshness came from many independent roots, that Europe was a jungle of competitive societies in which the most vigorous won the sun, and so flowered and expanded at the expense of their neighbours. Every European nation has its mass of literature—historical, political, military, economic—much of

it heavily annotated and still gravely quoted, as the tribes repeat the magic sayings of their medicine men, to show that each nation was separately rooted in a favoured soil, and that its own national genius, the most potent of gods, divinely nourished a chosen and favoured principle.

If they were right, does Europe now prove it? It is just possible that human life may have but one root on this earth. It is just possible that that much-maligned man, Jesus Christ, was not so badly wrong. It may happen that the pallor of our neighbours is a symptom of our own sickness.

When we stand at the Royal Exchange in London (where once a fanciful writer imagined he could hear the beating of the national heart), and see the Bank of England, the Mansion House, the show of the headquarters of finance, we never question that the England we know is not from everlasting to everlasting. Those stone façades are as well established as the hills. They bear the look of serene antiquity. The streams of humanity which are incessant below may change, though only in their names and dress; the renewed generations of the English

will continue to flow in and out of the hollow stones of their enduring city. That is our assurance. It rests on the simple fact that we see little that changes while we are here, and that we do not last very long. In truth, the industrial civilisation of modern Europe is no more than a few centuries old. Knossos lasted for four thousand years, and then was lost to human memory for two thousand more till recently its stones were uncovered in Crete, and the old myths of the Minotaur, the Cross, and the Dove of divine favour, were seen to have been but the commonplaces of a city which was dead when Athens was flourishing.

One night in France long ago—there was a war on—the subject of the rise of modern industry was being discussed with warmth, and I remember a romantic youth broke in with the marvels that had followed the brooding by Watts on a boiling kettle.

"I wish," slowly commented an elder man, "the damned thing had fallen on him." For, through some perversity, that elder was inclined to trace the inevitability of the Ypres salient, and his own task there, back through the multitude of mechanical inventions which

massed into an age of machinery, past the triumph of the industrial revolution which rose to its dark flowering of smoke on the compost of a slave morality, to the surpassing luck which England found in the shuffling of the world's affairs during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. That elder was the only one of us at that mess-table who could look on the great catastrophe in which we were then involved with any calm. He used to tell us that the whitened bones of Ypres were as natural as the Black Country—nothing there for wonder—it was only what earlier Europeans had asked for and what we had got. No good complaining, he used to say, about the inevitability of the inevitable, or the misfortunes of our late birthdays that had brought us in at the finish to it all.

We need not agree with him, unless we prefer to, as doubtless we do not, and we may absolve Watts from any responsibility for our misfortunes. No lucky tumble of a kettle of boiling water, on whomsoever it may have happened to fall, would have saved the world from the steam-engine. Give humanity a conjunction of suitable half chances in the fruitful

atmosphere and the right place, and away it will go again for a thousand years, more or less, as though mind were pollenated for the first time. It will build a new civilisation like all possessed; quite sure, too, as the philosophy of that time will prove, that in everything it did it was justifying the ways of God to man. When doubt creeps in and lessens the pressure of the vital force, as now doubt makes us hesitant, or when that spate of energy is spent, a decline begins. Great shipowners and ironmasters give names to the phenomenon at annual general meetings which accord with the prejudices of some of us, and suggest that we are not working hard enough, or want too much for what we do, or otherwise are violating the divine laws of true political economy.

It may be so. We may explain the obdurate facts, which are doubtless, in any case, the result of human folly, in the way which gives us most comfort. It is comfort we want in trouble, and not the truth. Perhaps the rise and decline of civilisations may be a response to some cosmic rhythm, as are the tides to the moon, though nobody yet knows to the pull of what lunar influence they reach glory and then

fade. We may leave that problem to those who speculate cheerily on what will happen to us when the sun dies. It is certain, to-day, that our circumstances are but the reflections of our spirits. As our thoughts are, so are our cities. Even the scientists during the past few years have thoughtfully prolonged the life of the sun, which is not now condemned but may continue in its strength ; and so perhaps we need not, like the ancient Cretans, allow the divine Dove to be overlooked and lost, unless we prefer that its message should be one we do not want.

CHAPTER IV

The train was on its way to the seaboard of South Wales. My fellow-passengers were commercial travellers. They were doleful over the fruits of their previous solicitations. "Wasting expenses," one called his present journey. "Never opened my order book last time. Shall I ever open it again?" He had a body like a cask, and there was a gold cable looped on its bulge. He spread his hands, and appealed sadly to his friends. They laughed. The misfortunes of fat men are comic. He had a story of an adventure with some shares in a Welsh shipping company.

"Do you know anything of ships?" implored the stout party, turning to me. I shook my head. He didn't want to know. He was making a friendly gesture to bring me into the circle.

"It was 'Arry 'Art told me about that company. His father used to live next door to a lighterman, in Limehouse. Naturally, I

supposed he knew all about it. Besides, you'd only got to look at the newspapers in those days. Ships were better than being a pal of Oppenheimer's. You knew if you could only buy an anchor for the drawing-room you were made for life. And there was my nice little round £2000 which I had made out of not telling the boss everything I knew. Knowledge is power." He passed his handkerchief over his large and querulous face, while everyone laughed at him.

"Well, then, you may laugh. It wasn't your money. And old 'Arry 'Art, he took me aside one day and told me how I could get in on the ground floor of a ship. No. I never saw the ship. But there was more than one. The promoters said so. It was a company of ships, and there was a lovely flag on the prospectus. The prospectus gave a table of earnings, and the way those figures swelled as they got to the bottom of the column would make me look small. The only word I didn't like in the prospectus was Cardiff. That place knows more than is ever published. And some nice kind Cardiff gentlemen, who knew what their ships could do, were inviting me to come aboard

and have some. So I did. I made an export package of my £2000, and shipped it. That was in 1920. It is still outward bound."

In the restaurant car a little later, one of that group of commercial travellers sat opposite to me with a book by Bertrand Russell beside his pot of tea. He was a young man, with what I guessed was a scar of the war on his cheek. I asked him whether the gloom of his big friend over the trials on the road of a traveller in the Welsh valleys was all fun. "Not all," he said. "There are over ninety coal pits closed down in South Wales. You know, a queue of miners in the rain, waiting on a cold official to get free food, doesn't really make one laugh. Commercial travellers cannot live on that kind of population."

"Bad enough," I said, "to read the speeches of great shipping magnates at annual general meetings, but that Welsh scene almost suggests that the world we used to depend on has gone for good."

He remained staring at his tea-cup for a time without answering. Then he looked up, and the scar on his cheek had changed to an odd colour. I tried not to see it, but met his

eye. That young man might have been looking at an enemy. "What of that?" he asked. "Time it went, wasn't it? Do you know Dowlais? Do you know any of those mining villages?"

I confessed that I knew what was in his mind; but he spoke again as though he were challenging any doubt I had about so startling an opinion. "Time that world went," he muttered. "I hope it never comes back. It's bad to see great steel works abandoned, and miners idle in the rain; but that's only the finish of the old period. That's what it brought us to, isn't it? There's the lie to your political science, as it was called. It was a mean and bitter world to the young."

A promising hint for me, for I was travelling on the bare supposition that I knew a little about ships and commerce. I was soon to learn that all one had known of ships and commerce in the past is of little value now, when you are examining the years of the modern to discover what they hold. The tokens seem to be the same, and they have the same names, but they have changed in relationship and often in nature. The accustomed landmarks have gone.

The Red Ensign, we used to be advised, was upheld chiefly by a smallish steamer carrying coal from England and bringing back grain. There were, of course, some other supporting factors. There were, very importantly, steel and cotton, our insular position, the battle and the breeze, the standard gold coin, our historic mission, and some vague national sentiments which became as concrete as bayonets whenever the appeal was made to them. Where have they all gone?

I had a pocket stuffed with newspaper cuttings, all of these latter days. They were harmonious in but one particular. Something was wrong. That sheaf of cuttings was the most recent information I possessed on a subject which once was my own. One brief paragraph told me that Barry Dock, which was constructed for coal, was derelict. That was like a word that London Bridge had fallen down. Shipping magnates, too great to be concerned only with coal, and whose liners, I remembered, if ranged alongside Welsh tramp steamers would reduce the little things to small change, were reported in pessimistic chorus. They said these were the darkest years for shipping within living

memory, and that there was no sign of any brightening on the horizon. Colonel Harvey, on returning to America after a long sojourn with us, had warned his countrymen that the day of England's productivity had gone. That cutting was a column in length. Glancing down its long grief, one saw that England was in the evening of its history. We could now, in effect, bake our old chestnuts by a dying fire while waiting for midnight. There were many reports of recent speeches by our own old and tried political guides at home, and these varied in their message. You could choose any opinion which suited your prejudice. I suppose their views depended on whether they were in or out. If they were in, then trade was improving; light was in the distance; there was a noticeable break in the clouds; unemployment was decreasing. But opponents, the next day, were just as assured that the official unemployment figures were but seasoned to taste, and would appal the least sensitive stomach if shown before being cooked.

Where was the truth in it all? Were our affairs as black as the funeral undertakers declared? Or might we accept Mr Winston

Churchill's optimism as the rosy reflection of ascending splendour ?

For some weeks I wandered about the foreshore of South Wales, looking for that truth as scientifically as is possible to a man whose bias prefers, unless it is closely watched, the sort of evidence which resembles what he expected to find. I came upon many facts, but I think they looked like the truth about the war, the colour of the chameleon, and the oddities which Maundevile noted on his travels.

There is that road which leaves Swansea High Street, just where you find the shops which sell nautical instruments and almanacs, the road which turns to go under a railway-bridge on its way to the docks and Port Tennant. Not a very attractive vantage, but I had to pause there among the seamen and firemen who paced the muddy kerb or stood staring into the future ; for at the opposite corner was the dingy building where once I myself signed a ship's articles for a memorable voyage. I could see the shop outside which I tried to soothe the skipper that day, for he was damning the soul of a mate who had failed him. In the window of that shop was the very binnacle which took my eye while

the old man was swearing, so long ago. I could see no change in the place. But the old man himself is now on a voyage from which he will not return ; and that seemed queer to me, for though I had not passed that street corner since that fine day, yet there, among the volumes on marine engineering and navigation in the shop window which displayed the binnacle, was the very book of my own which came out of that voyage. My mind got confused with the mystery of time and space. I did not feel in the least like a scientific investigator.

As I strolled towards the docks I saw a lascar standing in the drizzle, gazing at another shop window. There was a maroon-coloured poster stuck to the glass, and he may have been admiring its lovely colour. His eyes were fixed and astonished. The poster simply announced that a Jumble Sale was to take place at Mount Calvary. It gave a date, too. The truth about our commerce, so far as I had seen it, made me feel as I must guess that shivering Hindu felt as he regarded a notice announcing so enigmatic a Christian event.

Very early in my earnest pursuit of truth hidden somewhere among Welsh shipowners,

coal-trimmers, coal-merchants, chambers of commerce, labour leaders, and labourers, I began to envy politicians, who so easily find a generalisation which includes rich men and impoverished children in one sound justification. And how do the political economists manage the job, resolving so well out of a medley of ships, workhouses, Board of Trade returns, factories, cabbage plots, slums, and human nature, those inexorable arguments leading to simple laws that give a natural beauty to what else would be iniquitous?

In one week my collection of statistics, examples, and instances became a precious armful for a porter. It was time for an attempt to sweep the medley straight to a generality, in which ambiguities and anomalies would be overlooked by the incautious. But my skill in this science of political economy is small, and standing over the litter on my bedroom floor I wondered how a professor of the London School of Economics would set to work upon it; or better still, an eloquent candidate for parliamentary honours who had a large and ugly predicament which he could persuade an admiring audience was an error in their vision.

Now in Cardiff some traders, I remembered, talked with a cheerful hope of the early resolving of our bad debts. Their reasons were small and indeterminate, but naturally any sensible man would prefer to believe that everybody soon would be better off. They reported with satisfaction that seamen and firemen once more, as in the brave days of old, were failing to join their ships. This meant, I was assured, that the men knew they could find other berths, and so could steal more days ashore. These little things were important. So were some big recent contracts for supplying coal to South American railways. And Barry Dock was not derelict. Steamers were waiting to go under the coal tips. There was very much else, though it was all of that casual nature. It made me uncertain whether, for my motive in political economy, the truth called for a harp, as it were, or muffled drums. Yet one thing was positive. You may get opinions as diverse though emphatic from the traders and shipowners as you may from politicians and journalists. You may get any opinion you desire by choosing your man. For the satisfaction of your prejudice the official statistics will prove equally providential.

The facts and figures may be arranged, if you like, into something as pleasing as a floral design, or they may be made to resemble a memorial card.

It is true that some ships were waiting to go under the coal tips at Barry. Yet there were loaded coal trucks in the docks which had been there for six weeks. Moreover, one native of the town, looking with me down the vista of a quay with its colliers and the gaunt tips above them, exclaimed to me, "I don't care a damn for all the coal statistics. Look at that dock. We used to buy our corn with what such places sent out of the country. Coal! And in a few years not a ton of coal will be shipped east of Suez, and not much to that place. What are we going to do about it?"

I do not know. I will report what I find and hear. In the meantime those statistics do not look so bad. South Wales had in 1913 a year which it called its Peak Year. The output of the local mines then was nearly 57 million tons. It should be remembered that the ports of South Wales are all coal ports. Without coal they would end. In 1913, then, those ports shipped out nearly 30 million tons. In 1924, the total

output of the local coalfields was 52 million tons, and the exported quantity 25½ million. That quantity was not entirely amassed during strikes, obviously. In truth, the coal exported from South Wales in 1923, in spite of the circulation of Bolshevist literature, was the greatest in its history, over 30 million tons. The miners do not appear to be singing the Red Flag all of the time. But last year, and this, there is a fall in both output and export. For what reason?

Well, I felt I might discount, on a cold, wet night, such as it was, the comment of anyone who is confident he knows the simple cause. It is not Socialist Sunday Schools. The cause is more obscure than that, even though those schools are much less noticeable than motor cars. The cause may be the Tory Government, or the precession of the equinoxes. It has, no doubt at all, a relationship to the resolution of the bankers, our actual rulers, to make money dear. We may be governed in the traditional and constitutional way by some Premier or another with his Cabinet of Ministers, but the discussions between those Ministers and the principals of the great banks never appear in Hansard, like Parliamentary debates. For when money is made dear, when

credit becomes difficult, then, even laymen may guess, the life goes out of trade, and idle workmen will wait for doles, for charity, or for anything else that will keep children from crying for food. I suppose we ought not to call it starving the children, for that, though true, is not a financial term. We must call it a Return to the Gold Standard, and then nobody will be likely to notice the astonishing contrast between the distribution of large dividends and a form of usury known as bonus shares to people whose money is lent to banks, while children starve and workers perish if they cannot emigrate.

It is all very difficult. Yet it is safe for us to assume that if we trust our affairs to men who will close naval bases at home that wealth may not be squandered, and allow them to build other bases in the Orient, then our faith is but that of the child who tried to dip out the moon's reflection with a colander. If, for the sake of the excitement it affords us, and because we love risky sport and gambling, we allow men whose knowledge and intelligence might unsuit them for driving buses to meddle idly with Pandora's box, then we may expect to be somewhat bewildered, and even a little poorer.

Vast steel works, cold, silent, and dark, have a peculiarly depressing effect on the observer. So, I found, have the look of the miners' children up the valleys. If I know the signs, then in thousands they are badly undernourished.* In the village of Blaina I heard that most of its people are living on the rates and taxes. Still, not everybody is so unlucky in Wales. You may hear there of one shipping company which, in 1920, on its capital of £350,000 distributed £1,050,000 in War Bonds. But the barefooted children of the miners appear distinctly undernourished. I thought they looked very like the children one saw in the villages behind the German front line when at last the retreat began. One should never confess to the actuality of a class-war, as angry disputants describe it, for the suggestion is abominable, yet whatever name we give to it appears to make no difference to its victims who starve in Blaina and elsewhere.

Fear does not come to me as easily as it ought when I hear the dark forebodings of a ship-owning peer who controls an amount of tonnage to-day nearly double what it was in 1913; but as

* This was written before the General Strike. I saw these children in December 1925.

to those children, intimately concerned as they are with the Red Ensign, there is a specific warning : Whosoever shall offend one of these little ones, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck and he were cast into the depths of the sea.

Anything in that warning ? We are not so superstitious as we used to be, but there is that which is unpleasantly disquieting in the eyes of a starving child.

CHAPTER V

When the *Nigger of the Narcissus* appeared in 1897 it won the admiration chiefly of the literary critics, most of whom would not have been much at home in a forecastle. That was the main success of the book when it was published. In those days, by merely boarding a twopenny Blackwall bus, we could take pleasure in the sight of a fleet of large sailing ships as easily as in rows of unimportant shops. For that reason there could be no reasonable expectation of entertainment in the *Nigger*, a book with so common a theme. There is, on the face of it, no promise of romance in the things about us, seen in the light of common day, especially if we are not very curious.

The world has changed a little. The Blackwall horse bus, on the upper deck of which we sat back to back amidships, has changed into a motor vehicle. It is unable to take us to any sailing ships; for we learn there are now but six, of a large tonnage, under the Red Ensign. But the

Nigger is a classic, and we welcome every week yet another volume, by an old sailor, of memories of the days of sails. In the shops of the best residential districts where antique furniture is sold, and warming pans, pewter pots, and samplers, it is usual to see a notice, "Old Ships' Models Wanted." The sailing ship is with the roses of yester year, and we have become sentimental.

We are in another era. The ships of forty years ago were closer to the *Golden Hind* and the *Half Moon* than are the ships of to-day to those of the 'nineties. Drake's men, if they could have made the passage back to this bourne, might have been a little surprised by the *Cutty Sark*—a better ship than they knew, bearing canvas and gear strange to them — but they could have learned the hang of her before the cock crew, when it was time for ghosts to return to the shades. But let us suppose they were to come back to-day, to a motor ship. There the difference is; a difference the majority of marine engineers now serving at sea find it difficult to overcome, for the motor-engine has been quickly developed by inventors beyond the knowledge of even contemporary craftsmen. Shipowners, therefore, are hesitating over the motor ship.

It is not easy to find the mechanics who understand her inside. The men who so recently worked the clippers are with Columbus ; as far away as the years in which decked ships sailed the Nile, before the Pyramids were built.

If you inspect the earliest picture of a ship, that of an Egyptian vessel of the Third Dynasty, which we are told was about six thousand years ago, you will see its owner, or master, standing amidships with a whip in his hand. Now read again of the *Narcissus* and her master, and not for the story, but for what is betrayed of the difference between the quarter-deck and the forecastle. Captain Allistoun is an admirable character and a good seaman, but his views of the relationship of a ship and her master to her crew might be symbolised with a whip. The *Narcissus* was in the line of direct descent from the Nile ship. It was not Allistoun's fault. Things had not altered much. There was his task, and he accomplished it with what means he had, for he was a stout governor.

Now let us forget sonorous romance for a while, and see the *Narcissus* for what she was—a machine for profit-making, ill-designed, cranky, meanly found, cruel in her exactions, and beggarly

with her hard tack and pence to the fellows who pulled her through for owners and underwriters. She well provided a scene for drama, but as a carrier of cargo and a home for men she would have been suffered only by creatures so slovenly in mind and casual in their habits that they even failed to apply the best they knew to their chief interest—the making of money.

Conrad would have us believe that the purpose of the *Narcissus* at sea was to test the souls of men. The same might be said of hair shirts and such assays of nobility. There is no imperative need for us to worsen the tribulations of life, to see how much a fine spirit will bear with unmoving lips. But the *Narcissus* was not built for that exactly, though incidentally the miseries she imposed on those who took care of her provided a great writer with a theme for a dramatic narrative. Her object, precisely, was the earning of freights as cheaply for her owner as it could be done. She arose, with her white wings, out of just that impulse. Yet, says her eulogist: "Ships are all right; it's the men in them." As though a ship were as timeless and impersonal as the sea itself, and were not, like the mutinous behaviour of her crew, the

exact reflection, in every particular, of the dubious desires of our fellows. The winds of God, we are told, put her over till her lee bulwarks were under, locked her there, and nearly drowned her company.

I think it is more likely that her builders, in designing her, were moved as much by fiscal calculations as by physical. A ship pays her dues to harbour and other authorities on her registered tonnage, and dues form a heavy item in her working expenses. The methods of measuring the tonnage of ships are statutory, and shipbuilders, with slight difference in design, are able to make great differences in the figures on which dues are paid. The structure of a ship, therefore, is not conditioned altogether by the laws of physics. She is shaped to an extent by a human desire to pay as little as possible to port and other authorities ; but we should not expect the sea and the winds to make a concession to so human a weakness. We admit at once that so ignoble a cause should have no word in a drama of the sea, where a group of lonely men face the wrath of the elemental powers. But these facts, though unpoetic, have their consequences in human affairs as remorselessly as the trivial and

unexaminable motives of diplomatists presently result in the majestic spectacle of death amid the smoke and flames of bursting shells. We should endeavour to understand, not only the simple things we do, but their implications, which may have consequences outside our original reckoning. Folly and greed doubtless have their major parts in drama, and it is perhaps a proof of the essential goodness of the soul that it prefers to ignore any mention of them when presenting the resounding story of its conflict with destiny; the destiny, we observe, often of its own conjuring out of the mystery of the universe.

What impels me to point this out is precisely one of the books published recently, in which, as usual, an old sailor regrets the great days of sails, but cannot refrain from the usual condemnation of the British sailor. I find it strange that critics should be pained by the obstinacy of British workmen in their dislike of small pay and insufficient food for hard work, and who yet admire the same obstinacy when it takes men to sea against the threat of enemy torpedoes. Vice or virtue? Like many other writers, this officer and sailor looks upon the hardships of common seamen, ill-fed, ill-used, off Cape Horn in July,

working to windward a vessel that was already as obsolete as the gallows, as trials which did men a power of good and made fine seamen of them. And see how beautiful were those ships! We all exclaim at that. Man's incorrigible habit of day-dreaming when the day's work is over, though in rare cases it has added to the light of the world, yet more often has resulted in veiling with a rosy mist what was stupid or infamous. It is true that a delicate human spirit, undaunted if disillusioned, will remain to the end facing undefiled the most obscene barbarities of war. It may be even shocked into a deeper apprehension of life. Yet the ironic smile on the resolute face of a good lad as he dies in the muck of battle should not convince society, which ordered him to the sacrifice, of its own admirable ways.

The writer of the book on the old days at sea is typical of his class and time, or I should not have mentioned him. I have read a library on those old days, and of his kind. He was a naval officer. He sees the past in such a light that, though the idea of a class-war is made plainly absurd, yet it is just as plain that common men are different from some of us, and hardly so

good. We may be weary of this unconscious but confident vanity, yet still there it pleasantly and cheerfully faces us ; and who has the heart to lift a revealing mirror to it ? The nature of the common man varies, as we have seen, according to the way we view it. The same quality in the fellow may be both good and evil. There were those skilled coal-miners I saw on the Western Front, working in tunnels under the German lines, surrounded by explosives, moiling in silent expectation of discovery and obliteration by the enemy ; and yet that same native skill and courage, when the war was over, fell under the censure of good folk who then desired no more mines to be dug under possible invaders of English streets. It is the same with our naval officer and those merchant seamen. He does not doubt the skill of the fellows ; but foreign seamen, in many ways, are better. The foreigner is a steadier worker, easier under discipline, and not so drunken. This officer considers that the high price of drink and the early closing hours during the war did much to make a better man of the Britisher.

We will note, before passing on, that it would never do to write so of our bluejackets. Theirs

is the White Ensign. Public sentiment would protest aloud. But you could always say what pleased you of the fellow who fed us and maintained our own and other armies during the war. He never seemed to care, and we do not. There was never, we will note, an economic reason for defaming the bluejacket. The argument that we could man our Dreadnoughts cheaper with Germans, who drank less, and stood hard discipline better, would not have impressed us. On the other hand, in the case of the merchant seaman there was such a reason for educating us, long before the war, to the fact that the Britisher is less reliable as a seaman than even a lascar. The lascar costs as much, so we had to believe, but he is not so regularly drunk. What is patriotism? Well, it depends on what we want, apparently. There is never a need to reveal the impulse which prompts an argument. And this naval officer, of course, repeats the old story which many shipowners desired us to accept, that foreign seamen, in pre-war days, manned British ships because they took less beer than British seamen; foreigners were engaged not because they were cheaper, but because they were sober. It happens that when this was a

subject of controversy many years ago I spent a deal of time searching for information in the articles of ships, where the facts about wages were given. And the naval officer is wrong. Our ships obtained their crews on the Continent because the port rates were lower there. Nor were the foreigners always more submissive to stern discipline than the difficult Britisher. There were the cases in the police courts, here and in our colonies, to show that. Moreover, they had certain disadvantages, drunk or sober, and as to one of them it was often discovered, when a ship was in a difficulty, that it was unlucky to have sailors who did not understand orders when shouted in English on a British ship. Ships were lost because their men did not understand the orders of British officers.

The war, luckily, "wrought wonders," so we are told by this naval officer, on that dissipated merchant seaman of ours. We know this must be so, for our kitchen cupboards were replenished, as by ravens, during the dreary years, and our soldiers were taken across the water to wherever they were needed. It was an immense task, not to be accomplished by wasters, unless reformed by an earlier closing hour for taverns. It seems

as if the merchant seaman did fairly well, in fact. So well, indeed, that our naval officer is constrained to suppose that we must have had, as essential allies, dear booze and briefer drinking hours. It may not be so. We ought to remember, though we need not say it aloud, that the soldiers were actually given tots before scrambling over the sand-bags. Something, somewhere, seems awry in the gallant officer's argument. One of the features of an old battle-ground was the abandoned rum jars. Good men cannot be dissolved in liquor; but when the weaker brother has to face a long and ugly task, he is likely to pour a little spirit on his dull faith to make it flame more brightly.

CHAPTER VI

Yet it should be confessed that before the war the quality of the men who were going to sea in British ships was actually declining. Because the conditions and pay of our merchant marine would never tempt away anyone of spirit and intelligence, unless hard times ashore were even less promising than a forecastle, we had to employ foreigners. It seems unfair to blame the common seaman for that, but let the fellow remember, as he takes our reproach for his tavern habits, that man is a reasoning animal, and it was therefore necessary to form a logical justification for putting good money before his welfare. It is more comfortable for us to believe that his character was bad than that our avarice moved us to treat him meanly. I have seen the articles of a ship, a famous little barque, whose model now would be a delightful decoration for the top of a suburban bookcase, which gave the wage of her chief officer as £6, 10s. a month. He had, of course, his certificate as master. She was lost,

with all hands, and may have been overwhelmed by a tempest, and may have been blown up by dynamite, for she had that in her cargo. Nobody will ever know.

Able seamen and firemen, in December 1914, were paid on an average £5, 10s. monthly. The most paid to them during the war was £14, 10s. a month. The rate since 1923 has been about £9. They have no eight-hour day. In 1894 a Board of Trade Committee reported that, as a rule, a ship engaged "the smallest number of men . . . which could reach port if they all worked for their lives." The Medical Officer for the Port of London and other health officers round our coasts have year after year protested strongly against the accommodation provided for the crews of British ships. It is curious that pulmonary tuberculosis should be a common affliction of seamen, when they have a life on the rolling deep. It is not so curious when you find men crowded together in a damp and dark space which would be condemned in a slum area; for, because it is traditional, the crew is housed in the forecastle, the worst corner in the ship. The naval architect and engineer can devise a profitable relationship between cargo-carrying

capacity and speed and the costs of power and port dues, but there is no incentive to break the habitual and historic allotment in a ship's plan for the housing of the men ; yet, as she will not earn money without hands, the hands must be stowed somewhere.

We may change from sails to motors, and call it progress, all unconscious of that Egyptian picture, six thousand years old, in which the ship's master appears with a traditional whip. Progress depends, we begin to see, on our standard of values. Money or life ? Perhaps, too, change is not progress. Perhaps there is no progress except through goodwill and an awakening sense of fellowship. At present the engines progress, for they get the first and best thought in our plans. We will merely note that the death-rate among seamen has been always strangely high. Their work in maintaining the prestige of the Red Ensign is not a healthy occupation. We may read that, for the five years ending 30th June 1913, the yearly average of deaths among ten thousand workers was, for factory hands, 2·9 ; for miners, 14·0 ; and for seamen, 50·0. There should be no surprise, then, when sailors, considering a livelihood

for their sons, think of everything before ships.

Though let us not bother ourselves too much about the woes of the seaman. Let us say a fellow is a fool who endures conditions which could be improved with a little resolution and common-sense on his part. Poverty, we know, is a crime. Yet it is more certain still that we need not pay more attention to the current woes of the shipowner. It would do us no harm, perhaps, if we examined a little more closely, and as free as possible of the common distractions of our politics and prejudices, those facts in commerce and industry which get less attention in the press than strikes and other sensational crises. Then we might know what causes things to happen. The Red Ensign, for an example, is a symbol, in our cheerful hours, which stands for a casual sort of fellow who gets drunk or gets drowned, a life on the ocean wave, and much else which is easy material for hearty romance and ballad.

There is more under that flag than that. In August 1914, if you had the statutory documents to show that you were the owner or part-owner of anything that would float, you found in

dismay that you could not sell them. Nobody wanted to buy shipping shares then. It was astonishing to learn, in those days, how little was the faith people had in the money which they had invested, for insurance, in a Royal Navy. Nevertheless, in a year or two you amassed a fortune whether or not you willed it; and you did not have to share a crowded forecastle, in expectation of mines and torpedoes, to do that. You were left in no doubt about the very benefit of war, without sharing in its rigours beyond a little food rationing. The price of a 7500-ton steamer, according to *Fairplay*, progressed in the following manner: December 1913, £7, 2s. per ton; 1914, £8; 1915, £16, 13s.; 1916, £25; 1917, £22; 1918, £22, 10s.; 1919, £31; 1920 (March), £34, 10s. Her value increased from £50,250 to £258,750. The fruit of victory! But who shared it? We do not really know; but we know who did not. Not the man on deck, not the look-out on the destroyer, not the fellow in the trenches. None of those fellows.

We see that when the war was close upon us, the faith in our fleet and guns shown by many shareholders in our merchant ships would have

made that famous grain of mustard seed loom as great as the dome of St Paul's. The vast fortunes that were within our own reach, though we did not know it, will not bear thinking about now, for shipping shares were as cheap as paper litter in a gale. But soon the money sunk in a Navy began to bear its interest. I saw just before the war an antique steamer brought into a west-coast port to be broken up. She had been bought for £2000. The war came, and in a year her value on the mud increased to such an extent that, patched and not destroyed, her lucky owner was asking £70,000 for her. I do not know that he got it; but it is very likely. In those years there were reclused and hopeful folk who would have sunk their money in the canals of Mars. The facts and figures into which the British merchant marine blossomed magnificently during the years so dark that some people now cannot look back would seem, if set forth, as absurd and unsubstantial as the fairies in *Peter Pan*. They were halcyon days. Shipowners who had bought their ships at the bottom of the market, who reaped all the advantages of the years of the fabulous freight rates, then, in 1920, floated companies, made themselves directors at

fixed fees, and bought their ships from themselves, on the higher scale, with the money the public had provided. It looks, on the face of it, like anarchy. It seems, in a real sense, treachery to the men who perished. But no ; it was, of course, the outcome of sound economic laws, to question which would be Bolshevism. We should like to question them, though we dare not. We should like to know what those sound laws have done with the money since then. Where is it ? Is it like the lovely golden clouds of Hans Breitmann's party ? All we know for certain about it is that it numbs, like a dead hand, the efforts to revive trade and to make our ships pay in their competition with increasing foreign tonnage. It checks shipbuilding and depresses the standard of living for seamen and shipwrights. It is largely the cause of the gloomy view of our future we see so frequently reported.

CHAPTER VII

Some of us are not so easily moved by imposing symbols as we used to be, or else they move us the other way. Only recently I was about to cross a London road, but had to wait while a blaring procession passed. I saw with chagrin mounted figures falsely majestic in red cloaks and plumed Victorian helmets, with swords foolishly drawn, and beyond them were glimpses of a variety of theatrical dress. I remembered a sacrificial figure in muddy khaki, and was downcast. It was cruel that Drury Lane should flaunt publicly its flamboyant military rubbish. Then it dawned on me that these were real soldiers. This was a State procession ; and thus I learned that I must have passed, without noticing it, a climacteric in my life, and some symbols that once were accepted were now meaningless and untimely.

It depends on what a symbol represents for us, and that means, I suppose, what we see in it, which may be rather a different concept from

what others may see in it. Now, when your ship is between the Pillars, and you watch steamer after steamer pass flying the Red Ensign, you feel as though strange seas were populous, after all, with homely signs. But when the gale begins to abate in the Western Ocean, and you peer into the grey ruin of water and cloud, feeling that nothing alive is there, yet see a forlorn little thing braving the tumult, head to weather, in surprise you wonder what she is doing there, and what her name is. She is smothered just as the ocean lifts between you, but in that instant she makes her sign with a red spark. One of ours! You feel then you may chance on a companion in the downfall of the last day. That glimpse re-establishes your faith. The Red Ensign represents much that does not figure in the Board of Trade returns, perhaps more than all the impressive figures there displayed. It may be oddly true that man not only cannot live by bread alone, but that he had better not try.

What does that flag mean? A friend of mine, a marine engineer, during the war was outward bound again immediately after doing three hundred miles of his last voyage in an open boat. He was handling an electric bulb below, but it

slipped and burst on the grating. A greaser standing by leapt at the bang. My friend rebuked him. "No nerves here, my lad. That won't do."

The greaser looked sheepish. "I thought she'd gone up, sir." That man had been torpedoed four times. It was but a week since his last ship foundered. He had dried his clothes and was at sea again.

We have some good men, but they have no value which can be shown statistically like that of the tonnage to which they give life and wealth. They are of no consequence. They are often pretty rough stuff. But what standard of values do we use in these measurements? That is the point. It is those differing standards which get muddled in our discussions, and so, like magistrates who will not tolerate sin when it is against property, we would send a woman to gaol, though others might call her bold and motherly, because she stole bread for a hungry child.

We must choose which standard we will use, and the choice means much. Here I was again at the corner in Cardiff where my friend told me the story of the nervous greaser. Yet you might never learn there, except by chance, that Cardiff

has anything to do with ships and seamen. Queen Street of Cardiff is a broad and apparently an interminable avenue walled with plate-glass and very attractive with its display of evening costumes, gramophones, the only genuine briar pipes, dancing shoes in gold brocade, vanity-bags so ornate that they would make vanity itself look as humble as an applicant for out-relief, picture palaces, and restaurants. You note at once in Queen Street what is wealth and is therefore good. It not only increases desires, but can gratify them. There is not a hint in that street of the greaser who was torpedoed four times. Whispered words merely, gone on the wind! No hint is there of miners in subterranean galleries digging cargoes for sailors to carry out to exchange for grain. Nevertheless, fashionable Queen Street at its base is simply coal and the ardours of unimportant men. No coal; no vanity-bags. The ports of South Wales, Newport, Cardiff, Penarth, Barry, and Swansea stand between the miners and their customers overseas. The sailors take the coal from the miners, and hand it on. Without the call for those labours, then the fashionable thoroughfares, political clubs and

churches would become like the stones of Memphis.

But the seamen and the miners do not live in Queen Street, and so we are apt to forget their part in it. Those fellows are not easy to find, even if we had a reason to look for them. If we meet them, it is only when we have other matters in hand that have taken us beyond the place we know into unknown country. We must leave the central city, where the plate-glass and the show of luxuries are the earnest of our industrial welfare, and pass at last through narrower streets where we feel we are in an alien and unpleasant atmosphere which might be even dangerous. Explore the region in Cardiff which used to be called Tiger Bay. Its display of trade signs are unreadable to all but linguists. Its unsavoury shops and lodging-houses are kept by Arabs, Greeks, Maltese, Italians, Spaniards, Chinese, Japanese, and Jews. Probably some of the interiors of those places are better left unexplored and unquestioned. One is getting down to life near the bone. It is startling to see three nymphs sitting on a bench in a shop window, as though they were the goods.

It may be that we cannot have our Queen Streets without the squalid littoral beyond; not one without the other. We are not learned enough in political economy to solve so hard a problem. Wealth without dirt?

There is always a little relief near the dock-gates. Outside the docks are the solid offices of the dealers in ships and cargoes, and those enticing shops where patent logs are sold, binnacle lamps, compasses, photographs of ships, signalling codes, night-glasses, parallels, charts, and such books as *The Handling of Oil Cargoes*, *Knots and Splices*, *Know your own Ship*, Norie's *Navigation*, *The Motor Ship*, *Mother Shipton's Dream Book*, and *How to tell Fortunes*. For there is, wherever we find the sailor, a queer mingling of science and superstition with a little rich sentiment. Such a bookshop near the Cardiff Docks was displaying greeting-cards when I looked into it, cards in pink and heliotrope celluloid, with frills and central rich messages to the ladies lucky enough to get them. Each tribute was in its own cardboard box, at a large price; art to stir the soul of a sailor lad who is able to nicely calculate, nevertheless, in other circumstances, the strains and stresses of

steelwork in a seaway. But you could not buy such cards in Queen Street at any price, which is indicative, perhaps, of much else. It may not be knowledge and skill which separates people so much as their tastes in decorations.

CHAPTER VIII

Inside those dock-gates of Cardiff is an immense geometrical complexity of railway tracks, to cross which you must be alert for shunting locomotives in ambush. And there are the rectangles of the dock basins, and the steamers under those strange black skeletons, the coal tips. You would have no doubt the place is foreign if ever you should happen to sleep in a bunk in one of those ships. The cabin seems alive, conscious of what is without, though all is strange to you. Things talk in the room; or else it receives secret communications. There are murmuring voices within the walls, clicks, subdued grunts, sighs. Then, listening in a silence, you hear a call, the deep shuddering voice of a ship in the night across the water. A strange note, and for myself I never hear it without being stirred, most unreasonably, into a surmise of mysteries beyond my ken.

The ships, however, are not all mystery. These steamers in the docks of Cardiff are

nothing like liners, yet consider that unlovely one, with *William Sprott*, *Penarth*, under her counter. The tonnage by which she would be valued is 5000. Before the war she was worth £7, 10s. a ton, or £35,500. She was doing fairly well in the year before the calamity. Then, when calamity came, this is how it struck her. In the course of time, while her master went almost blind in his watch for periscopes, her usual freight charge to a Mediterranean port rose from 10s. to over £6 a ton. Her selling price, therefore, rose from £7, 10s. to £30 a ton, and her value, in the anarchy of war and industry, became £150,000. What made her so valuable? The man keeping the line in France, the look-out on the destroyer, the digger in the mines, and her own company. It was their devotions. But in anarchy you can never be sure of what will happen to valuable things, to men's lives, to the values of ships. In the scramble those values are snatched by active souls who did nothing to create them, or else they get lost. Yes, lost, if ever they were real. For the *William Sprott* is, or ought to be, written down to-day to about £10,000. If her value has not been so adjusted, then, in the continued

anarchy of our affairs, because it is impossible for her to earn a profit on so high a fictitious value, she is sweating her officers and men.

The docks harbour a fleet of such steamers. They made during the war immense fortunes with supreme ease, and lost them, as a rule—or so we are begged to believe—during the trade decline which began in the spring of 1920. The ordinary speculative affairs of Monte Carlo would look like the indiscretions of a curate's sewing party compared with the affairs of ship-owning during the war and for some years after it, governed as they were by the divine law of supply and demand. Those shipping deals may resemble, to common-sense, the casual accidents of a riot; but common-sense would be wrong, for we are gravely assured by the wise who are excellent at reasoning that the casualties of rioting are foreordained and orderly. Still, if the water in the capital of the companies controlling most of our ships were decanted into barrels, it would fill the holds of all the idle ships of the world. And so far as South Wales is concerned, that water, which looks so wonderful when disguised as sterling, was originally distilled from coal. Political economy and

finance resemble necromancy in some important particulars.

Where does the coal come from? You must leave Newport, Cardiff, and Swansea to discover that. If you will examine a good map of South Wales, you will notice, at the back of that protuberance of the coast which has Newport at one end and Swansea at the other, the heights of the Brecknock Beacons; and that up from the arc of coast deep and narrow valleys converge to the range of heights. The black wealth streams down those valleys from the pits to the ships.

Nobody would join in a dispute on a problem of geology who did not know faults from strata; and I am not sure that we have a title to speak of coal if we have not spent some years in a two-roomed hovel somewhere in the Taff Vale. It is as well to know what we are talking about, even in political economy. I remember once paying a call in Dowlais of the Taff Vale where the family, in its one room, were taking a meal on a table which had next to it a box on which rested the dead body of a child, waiting burial. There is a village near the head of the Vale which, in its setting of cinders and ash, with

the hills round it the colour of sin, and the continuous bursts of livid flames and dun smoke from its centre, might be the place of torment once visited by Dante. But it is not that. It is a normal aspect of our realm and the source of immense wealth. That last, however, you would never guess, for no land could call itself wealthy when challenged by the hovels of this place, by the mute appeal of its underfed, thinly clad and barefooted children. No wealth is there. I have never seen village life in any barbarous country at so low an ebb as it is in that Welsh village, which looks, not the origin of gold and fame, but of the thin and grey ooze of poverty itself. There seems little to be said for laws, natural or otherwise, which cheat children of life. It seems hard to justify the health of the State when its statistics require the faces of children to be pinched and hungry as they help to keep the Red Ensign aloft.

To describe that village would be as dreary as to explore it. I did that once. There was one home, which was a cellar with a single window, which we entered by a doorless opening that was a disused water-closet. One cannot enlarge on such material. That village

mainly is a community sharing two-roomed homes; and sometimes there are ten people in such a hovel. The place was properly pictured, as though Hogarth had set it, in a starving hound I saw in its main street last December, gnawing a dirty bone. I watched that dog, and so did a boy who ought to have been in hospital. We stood by a shop with cracked and patched windows in which blankets were marked as low as 1s. 11½d. each. Those blankets did not look as though coal kept miners improvidently cosy.

CHAPTER IX

If one desired assurance of the health of British trade, a glance at Liverpool might give it. Its waterside towers are, in more ways than one, the most significant landmarks in this industrial realm. There was once Gothic architecture, which came of faith in God and was a passionate adoration; and once there was Renaissance art, because man was joyous yet composed in a revelation of the nature and beauty of life. And to-day there is the tobacco warehouse beside the Mersey, with 36 acres of floors, no less, as its peculiar merit; and in which, one notes in surprise, smoking is strictly prohibited.

None of our seaports responds more sensitively than does Liverpool to the pressure of our industry. The more the chimneys smoke in the Black Country, the greater grow the buildings and docks alongside the Mersey. Its life is governed by the factories and foundries of the North and the Midlands. It is, in a greater

measure even than London, a port concerned with goods sold to foreigners. In 1924 the cargoes shipped from Liverpool were valued at £273,000,000; from London at £152,000,000. I regret to use these symbols to show our welfare, but apart from the indications of our gold standard no other evidence is published. We must refer to whichever god is greatest, though such figures might indeed be imaged as a vast stone god without a face; they might justify our resource to a tobacco jar of 36 acres. Still, it appears they are not great enough yet. Some shipping magnates of Liverpool, in their public utterances—which should not be confused with their private conversations in which they gain control of other lines of ships—would almost induce us to half-mast our merchant shipping flag, the colour of which, they judge, shows signs of fading.

It is easy for us to see that the controllers of trusts and combines might prefer that we should have an impression sad yet vague of their prosperity. We ought to get a sense of our lowly dependence as they shake their heads dubiously, in not a little grief, over the onerous duty, which they cannot ignore, to get us more

within their power. It is right that we should feel that we are a weary charge to them ; that our sustenance by these great minds is making life a burden to them.

Their city, however, does not itself reflect their misfortunes. The business premises of those magnates by the Mersey would make the stately pleasure-dome which Kubla Khan decreed by the river Alph seem a mere bungalow after all. It is not easy to suppose that those offices and warehouses register but progressive failure. Indeed the Mersey with its towers and shipping is so impetuous and tonic in its effect on a visitor that he is fairly sure that important ship-owners, who would persuade us to prepare for the towing to her last resting-place of a stately ship now past her day, and in the melancholy splendour of a nation-wide sunset, would look comic if their dark bark turned out after all to be the latest Cunarder on a morning tide.

If you would know what has happened to England in two centuries, what has come of the steam-engine, and spinning and weaving by machinery, then a ride on the overhead railway along the bank of the Mersey from Dingle to Seaforth Sands, a distance of about seven miles,

will show you. Liverpool in the seventeenth century was a fishing hamlet. It had no name. A civilisation may take some time to decay, but it will grow with the vigour and rapidity of a jungle once there is the right incidence of fructifying events. Where there was but meadow and marsh when Bunyan was seeing afar the Holy City, one trundles now above a long panorama of ships and quays, and past warehouses which are Egyptian in their massive and simple secularity. It is evident along the Mersey that we did not build England to accord with the visions of the seers, and that may be why great shipowners and politicians out of office are instinctively right in their dubiety when our dark satanic mills pour forth a little less smoke. They guess, we may suppose, for they would not have reasoned it out, that perchance the incentive to gain, that simple impulse which is our substitute for Gothic adoration of God, and for the joy and composure of the Renaissance in the wonder of life, was hardly enough on which to build enduring towers. Well, there between Dingle and Seaforth is what arose fortuitously out of no religious or moral impulse, but of mere hazard

and bonus. It is not without a certain majesty. It may seem awful and desolate to a spectator who is unused to the urgent and tumultous marge of a seaport ; yet so confident a prospect of huge structures and smoking energy is also evidence of an adventure of faith, just as is a Gothic cathedral or the abnegation of a Jesuit father among savages. The rectangles of the docks beneath our flying electric coach, a series of mirrors set in dark frames, the great steamers and their vivid funnels amid the sullen buildings and murk of a city, the cumbered railway sidings, the steady roar of loaded drays on the cobbles, may be after all but a desperate method of cutting bread and butter, but we must remember at least there is a lot of bread to be cut these days.

A prospect of reliant and flourishing commerce. It looks solid. One would not, without hesitation, exchange it for the vision of Augustine, or Bunyan, or Blake. What should we have if we did ? And beneath it all there must be something which is better than the simple desire for gain, or it could not last. I saw in Birkenhead three liners under the same house-flag loading for the East, stem to stern.

One heard that this line, for a wonder to-day, is under the personal direction of its owners. Its ships are built for use, and so embody the best that is known in naval architecture and engineering. They are not factors in speculation, even when a high price for tonnage is tempting. One I saw was a motor ship, one was a hybrid with steam and motor, and one burned oil fuel. The tonnage of the three might be 22,000 dead-weight. Those big steamers in themselves were signs of experimental adventuring, just as were the voyages of da Gama, Magellan, and Drake. They were sailing to the hour of their schedule; they were, in this bad time for trade, short of but 1500 tons of cargo; cargo they could have had, I judged, if I am still able to read the signs in a loading shed, but cargo which would have to wait for the next ships on the list because it was late in arriving. Punctuality in the delivery of cargo for that house-flag, and so no delay in casting-off; a matter of a firm's reputation in keeping its promises, "except the act of God, the King's enemies," and so on. "The little things," as Conrad makes one of his characters remark reproachfully—it was that simple but courageous skipper

in *Typhoon*—concerning a loose door-knob in a quite new ship: "The little things!" You would find no loose knobs under that house-flag, any more than a loose doubt as to its future. Science, enterprise, unremitting labour, and fidelity to contracts. Something to be going on with, some improvement on the blind instinct for profit.

Then look at the Mersey Docks and Harbour Board which administers the sea-front of Liverpool. It is composed of business men who freely give their service, because for one thing they want to be sure that the dues they pay are fruitfully expended. They, too, seem to have some sort of rough faith in the health and capacity of their Liverpool. What kind of faith is that? One of them said to me: "Things would be all right if men were content to work hard for 5 per cent." Things might be better still if we could name something beyond that interest, as it is called, but so far as he went he knew what he was talking about, as his abundant affairs prove up to his hatch coamings.

The lower Mersey has a strong stream and quick tides. Ships cannot be moored to river-side quays there as in the Thames. They

would be carried away. Liverpool was forced to be early in the building of docks. In a century and a bit the property of the port has grown from insignificance till the capital of the Mersey Docks and Harbour Board is now £40,000,000 sterling. The total exports of Liverpool for 1921 were £528,000,000; 1922, £484,000,000; 1923, £533,000,000; 1924, £582,000,000. We must measure our good that way, for what other signs could we have?

In the past we should have desired no more evidence of the well-being of any city. But are such figures sufficient to-day for London or for Liverpool? New docks, new ships. But new thoughts are changing the hearts and faith of hesitant men.

CHAPTER X

I WAS most careful, when in Liverpool and elsewhere, to secure the best and largest statistical figures I could get, but now I am doubtful that their worth is what I imagined. It is not easy to be certain which are the most important signs on the Mersey. The values of things change as we see them differently. They launched another battleship while I was there. She was said to be of great importance. She was that because she exceeded other battleships in speed and guns. Liverpool was stirred. Seventeen-inch guns and thirty knots! There was a princess to send the monster down the ways and a priest to bless her. Outside the dock-gates, however, during this state ceremony, there was a trifling difficulty. The kindly police were compelled to act. A nameless fellow stood there incongruously, with some words for the multitude from the Beatitudes. He was ordered away. But he returned, under a compulsion of which we know nothing, and counselled the crowd

again, from such a text, beneath the shadow of Britannia's armour plate. The police hustled him down a side turning. I don't know where that side turning leads. I forgot to ask.

You can rarely tell to what a thing will lead, or what the potency of a leaven, long forgotten in the mass, will work in the long run. We hear, for instance, that in the eleven years from 1783 to 1793, Liverpool slavers carried negroes to the value of £15,000,000 from West Africa to the West Indies. Negro slaves formed a sterling part of Liverpool's foundations, and when the smell of it became more than men could stand, and they wanted it to be removed, a Liverpool Member of Parliament declared that "nobody would introduce the slave trade, but that so large a body of interests and property now depended on it that no equitable person would abolish it."

No equitable person! And let us humbly remember that his was a common voice. That leaven! To what astounding consequences may it not lead? It will change even our moral principles without our knowledge.

Observe, too, that when we had ended our sterling business with the slaves, the slaves

had not finished with us. We are reminded by Mr and Mrs Hammond in their *Rise of Modern Industry* that throughout the long struggle over the iniquities of child labour in English mines and factories, a recent phase of our history, the pages of which it is better to turn over in the lump if we would avoid the horrors and humiliation, "the apologies for child labour were precisely the same as the apologies for the slave trade." The great industrialists, you see, had learned something in the years when slavery was normal, though without knowing what the lesson would do for them and their country. They had found a way to disguise what is called the image of God into a commodity for trade; and through the magic of this transmutation African negroes were revenged later in the bodies of English children. Cotton, iron, and coal masters had discovered incantatory words which would change the bodies of children into private wealth, wealth which it would be a violation of personal liberty to touch.

The world is full of magic. Magic is not hard to make if there is a reasonable chance of its acceptance. The plea that something is profitable can be as good as absolution for it; so

the power of money, like the divine right of kings, though it is as invisible and abstract as the rarest metaphysical tenuity, is secured by talismanic phrases. People will rebuke as unseemly the doubts of their own intelligence as they watch the rites of the worship of money. It will take the common people of Europe long to get full release from the exactions of dead and forgotten slaves. That mumbo-jumbo devised by reason when evil must be made to look good, magic which once caused mandate and ukase to sound as the awful words of impersonal divinity, which justified slave ships, and naked infants toiling in the galleries of English coal mines, and still gives war the aspect of righteousness, has not been altogether exorcised by the competitive incantations of the Church. We hear even now that coal should be dug sacrificially, on bread and margarine, because our trade statistics require it. And because of the expense of killing their elder brothers on the fields of France, we find it necessary and right to deprive school children to-day of some of the light of the mind, which is costly. When reason is moved by desire it can be depended on to prove what we want.

It is not easy for the mind to escape from the

ruts made by ancient thoughts. There is a great difference between the flint arrowhead and the 17-inch shell, but both are born of the same impulse. This may be the reason that a poor human skull, when we contemplate it in living superiority, grins at us. We have life, but that has control. This obscure bewitchery makes history, even contemporary history, even the show of Liverpool which may be seen by going to it now, very illusory. Once, we know, the Venetians had the chief benefit of European commerce through a monopoly of the traffic from the East across the isthmus of Suez. When Vasco da Gama rounded Good Hope he did more than discover a sea route to the Orient ; he shifted the centre of gravity of commerce from the Mediterranean to the Atlantic coast of Europe. It was not so long ago. The last Venetian fleet to England, we are told, was wrecked off the Isle of Wight in the year after the Spanish Armada was fought. And by then, of course, across the water, the New World was waiting for the traffickers of Northern Europe to begin, and Europe was waiting for the steam-engine. It is possible that that engine came too soon for us. It made money, but what else ? It did

merely what we asked it to do. The mechanical inventions which broke up English village life, and concentrated great populations round factories and foundries, arrived as gifts to folk who had been bred in a slave-code, and morally were as unready for such gifts as for haloes. We are apt to forget that the civilisation we have built out of supplying cheap goods to the world is hardly two centuries old. The Chinese took longer to perfect a glaze for porcelain.

The first steamship crossed the Atlantic but yesterday, as human history is reckoned. The merchants and shipowners of Liverpool, a decade before the opening of the Suez Canal—which changed ships from sail to steam even on thé voyage to the East—were forced by the very exactions of their past, and Liverpool's geographical position, to establish those merchant fleets whose house-flags now are famous. They grew up smelling the sea. Ships were as familiar to them as their homes. They listened to the intimacies of master mariners who knew the desires of distant peoples; and they were confident in their reliance on the capacity of Lancashire, Yorkshire, and the Midlands. They could not escape from their

traditions even had they wished to. Creating fleets and husbanding ships, too, cannot be quickly learned by those who, like the American Shipping Board, have merely a sincere desire to do these things to perfection.

Liverpool knows what to do with ships without consulting the oracle. The knowledge is with the family and in the blood. Most of us did not know so simple a truth as that the top of a trade boom is the beginning of a slump. More of us understand that to-day. There was a shipowner who, during the trade exaltation which began to deflate in the spring of 1920, made a million sterling by merely handing over his fleet to an ignorant but enthusiastic public company, which took care of it during the years when there was nothing for it to do. But we will not attempt to rationalise the instinct of traders and shipowners who have, so far, always rightly guessed the way to an increase of prosperity. Certainly these men do not divine in Liverpool, amid the puzzling dilemmas of our trade which the revolution of the war has produced, any lessening of the urge on which rose their city's warehouses. They are deepening their river and enlarging their docks.

We know we cannot afford to remove the shame of ill-fed children from our streets, for so we are earnestly advised by the best people. It is too severe a task. They must be right, for see how difficult are the tasks that are successfully accomplished by skilled and energetic humanity, when the cause is more urgent than youngsters who need food! There was once a Mersey bar. It was a grave hindrance to shipping, for it had over it but 11 ft. of water at dead low-water spring tides, and modern steamers will draw 30 ft. A great submarine sandbank might seem harder to cure than a child's lack of bread; yet the Mersey bar has 25 ft. of water over it to-day, when the tide is at its lowest. The bar was pumped up from the bottom and deposited in another part of the sea. It took a deal of time and much thought, but at length 400,000,000 tons of hindrance to commerce was removed. Dirt, ignorance, and stunted children do not, we may suppose, hinder commerce, at least not to a calculable appreciation of it in counting-houses. Yet it is evident that if man could only remove other basal prejudices as readily as he does sandbars when he wants a safer course for his ships, then—why then, for one

thing, there would have been no need to write this book ! I might have proved more useful as a stoker on a sand-hopper.

And at Seaforth, near Liverpool, he is completing other immense works, some new docks, which are complementary to that of bar removal. To stand where those new works may be surveyed, and to peer down into the excavation, is to feel that man has begun a new chapter of Genesis on this earth. From the roadway the works are too great to be seen. You might suspect, perhaps, that Liverpool in that neighbourhood was tinkering with its affairs, but no more. A guide led me from the road into an illimitable cavern in ferro-concrete, empty but for a terrible gloom, its vistas of stalactitic iron pillars fading into night. It might have been a temple dedicate to an unknown pagan god whose face I hope never to see. We mounted cold stairs, while our footsteps echoed in space, till we reached a concrete plateau on the roof of the world, from which a wind out of the sea tried to whisk us over the roofs of the city.

Far below us, below even the threatening level of the grey sea, was a dim gulf with silent precipices that distantly were but curtains of

night. Their darkness fell abysmally from the brimming light of the sea. On the profound floor of the gulf dragons appeared to be fuming and writhing, but these, when looked at in fixed astonishment, resolved into remote smoking locomotives with tails of trucks. Across the twilight terraces of the hollow earth there drifted obliquely slow comets of smoke and steam, which rose till in places they dissolved the dark rim which kept the sea from pouring down. It was as though the walls of subterranean night had been breached, and the vast upper sea was about to roar down into our empty sphere. Man, in the magnitude of his tasks, can create a sense of terror.

Well, only engineers could value that work in its exact dimensions, for terror, even if it could be measured, has no value and was not included in the plan of the docks. I know, however, for even a writer should know something more than his mere astonishment, that the new docks will minister to greater ships than any afloat, will even dry-dock them, and that they will be able to enter Liverpool from the sea at almost any state of the tide.

Those docks are built for the future. Across

the water, even while I was wondering at man's challenging audacity, a new hypertrophied warship was being launched, at the price of seven cathedrals, or fifteen thousand homes, and a disciple of Jesus was blessing her huge guns, while choristers chanted praise to whatever deity may approve of that honour. We seem not only able to give substance to any of our imaginings, such as they are, but to know of a god who will think we have done well.

At present that is the way our thoughts go. We have proved, at least, that when we are dealing with matter, a task of any magnitude is to be overcome in time by cunning. Yet we may have to do better than that. There may be other problems about us, as new and as potent yet viewless as was the germ of the steam-engine in its day. They may be of greater consequence to humanity. Unless their nature is understood they may make a mock of our great docks and our most formidable weapons. I can see one already. Consider the spectacle of Liverpool's Scotland Road slum area of waste life! There is neglected wealth, if you like.

Why not dig into that for riches? Where

is our imagination? For Liverpool, like our other great and wealthy cities, has its dreary desert where humans exist only as a sort of plasm which permeates dismal reefs of bricks. Is there no engineer of genius who can invent a way to convert the potential richness of that life into something as gracious as guns, as profitable as docks? Or is our science only for concrete and steel? Because there is no telling what the chance words may do of that nobody outside the shipyard gates when the warship was launched, no guessing where they went, and what fire they may light. As the story goes, Dagon fell.

CHAPTER XI

London is the oldest and greatest of our ports and the most difficult to see and understand. It is more than a port, as everyone knows. It is a world market. There is nothing which is the work or produce of a distant country that you cannot buy in London. What all the world makes is there. It used to be Carthage, Venice, Bruges, and Amsterdam ; but the market now is London. For how much longer ?

Some of the seaports of the British Isles—Liverpool, for instance—though very great, are yet of recent growth. The quays of others are ancient, as are those of Bideford in Devon, though Bideford now must be satisfied with its ancient laurels. London is greater than all, and the most ancient. Ptolemy's map of about A.D. 140 places Londinum, though wrongly. He has divorced it from the Thames estuary. But it was there then, of course, and perhaps for long before, though recent historians have suggested that London began only as a landing-place

for the ancient British stronghold which is now the city of St Albans.

There is no doubt that the Romans found the nucleus of London about St Paul's Hill. The creeks below and the paths down to them have persisted through history. They were the beginning of what sailors know as London River. They were the origin of that tradition which grew to be the most august wherever in the world ships and seamen assembled. You will find along Wapping and on the south side of the Thames numbers of openings on the river known as "stairs." Well, those stairs are probably the most ancient ways of the capital. They were the more or less easy approaches for men who wished to land from coracles. They grew into regular landing-places, where later there was a dock or a wharf, as Queenhithe and Puddle Dock. Some of these sites by the river bank have names which are still on the map of London, and occur in the oldest records. London was certainly a seaport thirteen hundred years ago.

What made London River so great? Its geographical position and the accidents of history. There was a time when the Mediter-

ranean distributed the luxuries of the Orient over Europe. Caravans conveyed across Asia the silks and spices of Cathay and the East Indies to Alexandria. When the Turks captured Constantinople, and closed the old caravan routes, Arab sailors brought the produce to the isthmus of Suez. The Venetians secured the monopoly of the trade from there. Commerce, then, was only in luxuries for the rich. Iron and coal were not important, and there were no factories, such as we know them. Then in 1498 the Portuguese discovered the route round the Cape of Good Hope to the East. In another century the Dutch, too, had found it. The Spanish, and the British about 1578, reached the East Indies by sailing westward, for the American continent was by that time established on the map.

Those accidents and discoveries brought commerce from the Mediterranean round to the Atlantic coasts of Europe, and Venice faded out of the picture, though London as yet did not dominate it. Antwerp and other continental cities were more important as commercial centres. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, together with a shuffling of the

world's affairs in which England got consistently lucky deals, there were the inventions which changed us from an agricultural to an industrial nation. When the age of machines had fully come, England's fortunate place was between Europe and the New World. She had the iron and coal and the colonies, and she led easily in the work of supplying, not rich folk with luxuries, but the common people of the world, who are more numerous, with pots and pans, cottons, woollens, and such stuff.

And, in fact, the new commerce grew with such a rush that old ports and roads were altogether inadequate to the expansion of trade. London River, at the end of the eighteenth century, with no docks and a fleet moored four abreast in the stream from London Bridge down, discharging into lighters, was choking itself. Ships found great difficulty in getting in or out, the river was silting up badly, and merchants were losing, so they estimated at the time, about £800,000 a year from their cargoes, because the river thieves were organised into large, influential, and skilful gangs. These very thieves expressed great indignation at the project to build docks enclosed by high walls.

Other interests were as strongly opposed to the suggestion of docks, and fought the plan desperately, but the docks had to come.

The first ship-and-cargo dock, with warehouses, was the West India, which was opened in 1802. Then Brunswick Basin, where the East India Company fitted out its ships, was converted into a similar dock. The London, St Katherine's, the Surrey Commercial, the Royal Victoria, the Millwall, the Royal Albert, the Tilbury, and, last of all, the George V dock, at present the most scientifically equipped dock in the world, followed to the present day in attempts to cope with London's increasing trade.

The earliest docks were favoured with a monopoly. At that time nearly all goods which came into the country were dutiable. But as the padlocks were wrenched off the King's Locker and the trade of the country became free, the monopolies had to go. Even the docks and free trade, however, did not release London River entirely from the cramping narrow interests and stupidities which looked upon its commerce as a mere chance for private loot, and not as necessary to the national life.

Heaven knows how many companies, ancient

privileges in the hands of the incompetent, and various authorities, muddled the government of the port and its work. The opening of the Suez Canal in 1869, which signalled the end of the sailing ship, and the rapid increase from that time in the size of steamers, at last brought the merchants and shipowners of London hard against the fact that their port was trying to meet the new era with the methods of a mediæval city. London River was obsolescent, with an increasing trade.

In 1909 all the various dock companies and the Thames Conservancy were merged in the Port of London Authority, and for the first time in their history the citizens of London began to see what their river meant to them. It is curious to note the date. In that year London had a population of about six and a half millions within a ten-mile radius, altogether dependent for its life and health on the way the daily tides were used in its river, and yet, so slowly does human consciousness awaken to a recognition of its changed circumstances, the Thames was being managed as though it were a series of competitive waterways.

The history of the development of the port is

more romantic than most picturesque novels, but for the full story one must go to Sir Joseph Broodbank's two volumes. Most people would be satisfied with a glimpse of the docks. How is one to get it? It is easier to see the Riviera in winter than the sombre and impressive show of London and its river from Gallions Reach at sunset. The docks are scattered about on both sides of the stream from London Bridge down to Tilbury; the Pool, the Lower Pool; then Limehouse Reach, Blackwall Reach, and Greenwich Reach which loop the Isle of Dogs; Bugsby's Reach beyond Blackwall Point, Woolwich Reach, Gallions Reach, and so on to Northfleet Hope and Gravesend.

If a traveller would see how noble is the river of the capital, and how full its life, let him go to Limehouse Station and find Narrow Street. Then, from an opening over Duke Shore—he should time his visit for the top of the flood—he has a great prospect of waterway. Opposite is the angle of the south side which encloses the Surrey Commercial Docks, and on his own side, within view, are the gates to the West India Docks.

Dockland is a murky but attractive region,

a country for personal exploration, but it has precious little literature on which the venturer may depend for guidance. He must, for one thing, surrender the enticing prospect of lurid Oriental dens in Limehouse and elsewhere. After all, what he should want is the reality, not romance, and the reality will surely satisfy him if he can get down to it; but that is not very likely unless he is accompanied by a good guide or is superlative himself in understanding and sympathy. Besides, he should be warned that he must walk and walk till he is ready to drop with fatigue.

The gloom of the region, which even sunlight relieves only into dinginess, requires as stout a heart to carry its depressing influence as ever was needed by a traveller in a northern land unremitting in its opposition of rock and sullen light. Let the traveller enter Tooley Street, and then keep as close to the river as he can till he comes out again by the Surrey Canal, Deptford, and he will have learned what I mean. But more, much more than that. He will be tired, but he will have secured a memory of a city he never knew existed. A surprising place, and in one or two corners which are to be found by

Lavender Pond, when the journey is more than half done and twilight and the flood have come together, even awful with its suggestion of magnitude and reserve. If he is an artist he will admit that he has received impressions that baffle his medium. Music, say one of Beethoven's slow movements, might render what he feels.

Or he might take the train to Silvertown and try to understand the implications of the vista of liners under gigantic cranes in the new George V dock ; a dock which will accommodate ships of the largest size, except those few abnormal monsters that are favoured by American travellers, the ships which are furnished with pergolas and include skilled horticulturists in their crews. The miles of concrete quays, as he walks eastward to Gallions Station for a train back to town, will tell him more of Empire than all the pæans of imperialists.

For there are ports and ports. London is more than a seaport. It is a world market. There is no good thing, or no thing good for some purpose or another, which cannot be found in London if you know where to look for it. The market terms for some of the commodities displayed normally in the warehouses of the Port of

London Authority would sound in Clapham or Golders Green like the passes to mystic rites—cubebs, scrivelloes, spads, dhoties, myrobalans, tragacanth, loonzain, nubbly culm, narwhal horns, pirns, and goodness knows what. The London Dock would show a visitor with the written warrant of the Port of London Authority more in a few hours that would give an apprehension of London's essential service to the world than any amount of rhetoric.

In London there are men so trained in the discrimination of tea, spices, ivory, and other precious consignments, that they may be said to have a sense withheld from ordinary citizens. Within a brief area of the London Dock—even omitting its historic wine-cellars, which no reasonable creature with a pass would for a moment think of doing — there is sufficient to awaken a visitor to a shadowy understanding of the fact that, to foreigners, London is what Alexandria and Venice used to be. The floors where rubber is assorted and displayed, pearl and other shells, wool, ivory, spices, essences, are brief indications. The men who work here have a knowledge which is hereditary. Or go to Cutler Street and see

the porcelain, bronzes, silks, rugs, and carpets from the East.

Nor is that all. It is less than half the story. Commerce is a complicated affair of appetites and needs, science and organisation. There are now over eight million of people around Charing Cross who must be fed and clothed. A mere guess would tell anyone that sufficient to meet the wants of so great a multitude could not be stored beyond the requirements of a week or so. And that is the bare truth. The Port of London Authority is concerned with but half the traffic which enters the river. The other half is the work of the wharves which line the stream for so many miles. The Thames is a friendly river to us. It allows quite considerable steamers to berth on the mud at low water and it makes no really serious effort to take them from their moorings when the ebb or the flood is moving strongly. That fact is highly important for Londoners. It is not the great liners which do most to keep us alive, but the smaller craft, which may come in on one tide, discharge perishable provisions, and are away again perhaps on the next flood.

To supply the daily needs of so many people

demands a rapid and supple transport. The upper end of Tooley Street, where London's breakfast-table is kept fresh, would show a visitor, if he is there early enough and is active when looking after his own neck, what that work means. Over a thousand tons of butter alone are handled there daily. The Thames, luckily, has a rise, a fairly quick rise, of 23 ft. at London Bridge, which is forty miles from the sea, at high-water spring tides. From the bridge downwards on both banks there are very many miles of wharves, and a network of roads which everywhere includes the margin of the river. Small ships may come alongside and discharge in one tide, while motor vans receive the produce of continental agriculturists and convey it at once to the outer radius of the metropolis. London is kept alive by the tides of the sea, and would quickly perish else. Yet not many of its citizens know that it has even a foreshore.

CHAPTER XII

It is a common error to see the docks of London as the port of London. We have even given the seaward side of the capital the popular name of Dockland. But seamen know better; their traditional name for the port is London River. The docks are less than the half of Dockland. The Thames with its wharves and quays is much the greater half; and the story of the wharves and quays is almost as long as the history of the capital, for certainly they had their origin at a time when the waterway was first used by traders from overseas, and that may have been as long ago as the building of Stonehenge.

Yet, like much that is historic and important, the buildings on the banks of the navigable river are as indecipherable to most who see them as are documents written in foreign symbols to the uninitiated. The masses of wharves and warehouses all the way from Woolwich to London Bridge appear to the traveller to be as haphazard and unrelated as things that came of chance.

The docks of the Port of London Authority are related, quite evidently and in an organised way, with the modern demands of shipping and commerce. They are a picturesque side of London to which visitors are guided as they are to Westminster Abbey and the National Gallery, if they would know what is important in London. Visitors frequently enter London by one of its greater docks, and depart in a great liner by the same way. Great liners, therefore, and great docks, are the measures of London's consequence. But the irregular dark cliffs which line the river itself for ten continuous miles till the Pool is reached, if they are seen at all — and even Londoners seldom view that sable and principal portal to the city—might be nothing but the shadows of our past, rather too solid, perhaps, to be shifted, and therefore allowed to remain.

Those river-side masses are picturesque, of course. Artists have loved that side of London. Whistler was moved to some of his finest etchings by the foreshores of Wapping and Limehouse. Yet modern commerce, especially when it concerns the centre of an Empire's trade, must live on something more palpable than the

inspiration of an artist. Commerce, now an intricate problem of science and finance, arises out of the simple needs of mankind for food, clothing, shelter, light, and warmth. Simple, when so stated! Yet about eight millions of Londoners must have daily maintenance within an area which measures twenty miles by twenty. Simple, yet every city of a continent has become so dependent on other cities for much that it requires that it is likely to perish if an important conduit of trade should be closed. Our Thames wharves and quays, therefore, are not haphazard. They grew with the life of the city. They are organic and vital, adjusting themselves and growing to the demands of the organism. Even now a curious adaptation to the new times may be observed on the river. Before the coming of the docks, ships lay in tiers in the stream. When the enclosed docks came, the ships berthed within, because the docks afforded greater security for merchandise. But merchandise to-day is as secure on the river as in the docks, and there is a renewal of riverside activity because ships at the wharves have more freedom of movement, economy in handling, and quicker despatch. Vessels drawing 23 ft. of water

may berth in the Pool of London. The St Katherine's Dock, with its entrance in the Lower Pool, is an easy picture for the admiration of visitors. With its great warehouses rising directly from its basins on immense Egyptian columns of iron, it does give not only an impression of beauty, but a sense of its vast storage capacity. It is rivalled across the water by a complementary dock of which few Londoners have ever heard. On the south side of the river is a series of wharves and warehouses known as Hay's and Cotton's. Now, only merchants and shipping folk know of these wharves, though their apparently unrelated masses form part of a vast single organisation for discharging and loading ships, for transhipping and the road transport of cargo, and for storage. The floor space of Hay's and Cotton's is equal to that of the St Katherine Dock. It can accommodate nine steamers at a time.

Why should this series of wharves have acquired this important work and character? Largely it is a matter of tradition, and that tradition and the work of the wharves have made of Tooley Street, which runs behind the wharves, the provision mart for the capital. On

the opposite side of the river is Fresh Wharf. This wharf also has its character. Much of the foreign fruit for London, both fresh and dried, is landed there; and again, therefore, the street market is immediately behind the wharf. Great Tower Street is largely occupied by the wholesalers of dry groceries, because the bulk of their commodities come to the near wharves of the Pool from Spain, Italy, Sicily, and the Levant. Billingsgate, of course, we know. It is the threshold to the Dogger Bank.

At one time, before the coming of the enclosed docks, London's quays took nearly all the cargoes landed in the port. Even then they had their own character, acquired by custom and privilege. Galley Quay of Lower Thames Street —a name which survives to-day with that of Botolph and of Fresh Wharf from the list of "legal quays" enumerated in an Act passed in the first year of Elizabeth's reign—handled wines brought in galleys from Genoa. But the rapid growth of the dock systems diminished the life of wharves. The docks were given statutory privileges, and trade was transferred to them. Yet presently some of those privileges lapsed. The trade of the port increased, and in the

middle of the nineteenth century there began a reconstruction of the wharves and warehouses of the riverside. They were adapted to the traffic of small ships engaged in short voyages, for which a quick discharge is essential to both shipowners and merchants, because, as a rule, their freights are perishable and therefore must be landed without delay and placed upon the market. It was to this trade that the wharfingers especially addressed themselves, and they did this at a time which coincided with the beginning of a long period of apathy in the managements of the docks. The result was that the riverside returned to life again. Then, when it became necessary to reconstitute the docks of London and place the whole of them under common management through the Port of London Authority, the wharfingers secured their legal right to what is known as "free water." By a section in the Dock Acts the lighters of the wharfingers are exempt from charges when using the docks. This enables the wharfingers to have cargo discharged overside into their barges from ships within the docks and brought for storing to their riverside warehouses.

The wharves of London have had no historian.

It is even impossible to estimate what fabulous amount of money they represent. Any investigator would himself have to calculate the total length of the quays and their warehouse capacity. They are not only essential to the maritime work of the capital, but they nourish daily the life of London, for without their vast fleet of barges and tugs and horse and motor vans London's circulation would stop. If any visitor wishes to feel the immense pulsations which keep the circulation swift and easy in a body so vast, let him go to Tooley Street, especially that upper length of it which leads under London Bridge to Bankside, or walk from the Tower to Wapping, along Upper East Smithfield, preferably in the morning; and if he should get caught by the bewildering rush of a busy day in either place he may admit afterwards that he felt a little nervous about it. For these riverside thoroughfares are as narrow as chasms. The buildings are ponderous and connect high above the roadway with a webbing of girder bridges. There are precipitous movements everywhere, in the roads and in the air. Endless processions of men move in space across the bridges, merchandise rattles up and down the warehouse fronts, and

the lively vans in the road are diverse and unexpected. It is a spectacle of intense activity not to be matched anywhere else in London.

It is natural that maritime commerce should be popularly associated mainly with large and ornate ships, which enter dock slowly and impressively and remain in harbour for a period commensurate with a dignified life. But the truth is that most of the fetching and carrying of the world is done by ships which attract no popular attention whatever. The war showed the value of the small craft—yes, even the old schooners and ketches whose day was supposed to be past. They are easily handled, and they may enter harbours which big ships cannot look at. All they wanted, it was found, was motor power. This is easily given to them, and with it they are independent of winds and currents and may approach a berth with the directness of a motor car to a street kerb. Before the war there were many who supposed those small vessels were obsolete. It is clear now that the cheap overseas traffic of the future will be by such vessels, ships of about 1000 tons, of light draught, which will make a direct approach to a roadway to be quickly cleared, and so away again.

CHAPTER XIII

"The storm seemed nothing more than usual," wrote a friend in a letter to me, faintly critical of a dubious interest of mine in political affairs; "it was bad, of course, but I didn't know how bad till I saw in the papers that a steamer had gone down close to my own place, and that her men were drowned. And no explanation was given. She just disappeared. Why don't you concern yourself with such men, instead of politicians?"

But what can one do? As well ask why we concern ourselves with fire insurance, or sin, or the look of the weather. Anything may happen. Not a war-shrine in a back street of London but should remind us of the nearness of unseen powers that have names, for after all they are but men no more exempt from laundry bills and foolish talk than you or me, yet who may give a form to our doom. One has but to see Their Importances, and to hear them at a public assembly as they pull

at their coat-lapels while wondering what they shall say next, to sense in alarm that a citizen should not give all his best attention to his standard roses.

Who knows why that ship foundered? Her hatches may have come adrift, as hatches do at times when a deck is heavily swept. Then, if they cannot be made fast, down she goes. Her men may go too. One winter night in the Atlantic I watched—though there was not much to be seen in the dark but dim bursts of foam—I watched while unseen shipmates laboured to make fast some loosened hatch-covers. It was a close call. Yet our trouble was really very simple. In truth, our ship was carrying over two hundred tons more than her capacity, at thirty shillings a ton. It was the alteration of her load-line through a deal in politics which came near to drowning us. But the men won, in four hours of desperate work, while the seas constantly swept them and jammed one of them into a winch. They were not heroes. They were merely good seamen, and they turned-in long after midnight without even the reward of hot coffee.

But as Kingsley once reminded us, men must

work, and must work the harder when things go wrong in heavy weather. His song concerned fishermen, who are rough characters. It is seldom that anyone makes a song of what those men do, and they themselves never make a song about it. How should I have known of a ship that was nearly lost through a memorandum done in the Home Office, and of men who saved her, if I had not been aboard? It may be that if such rough characters did not build and sail ships, without pondering over-much on the way the Home and other public offices shape their affairs at the bidding of Money, did not dig coal and iron, lay brick on brick—though never as many in an hour as they should—did not grow corn, herd cattle, attend to engines, push heavy weights about in the docks, and all that, perhaps the more refined work of the world, the best that man can do, would not get done at all. We ought to remember, at least in our leisure moments, the power that supports us. If that support were withdrawn? It would be no joke to have to raise a crop of oats in a suburban garden and wait for it to ripen into oatmeal. In the meantime the standard roses would perish. The mood for contemplating Relativity and the

origin and destiny of life would not so easily come to us. We should be otherwise employed. Perhaps we are too inclined to fancy that the freedom in which we may deliberate the mystery of God is the ordination of discriminating natural laws which have set us apart for so high a service. Yet it may not be so. It may be luck. It may be that the majority of our fellows are good-natured and uncritical when maintaining our ships and our affairs. The world must be kept turning, and they do it, taking ships to sea in any weather and chancing the hatches; and, if the ship is lost, building another, and then home to sleep uncomplainingly, four to the bed, in a one-room Glasgow tenement.

That is why the foreshore of London is more to me than Oxford or Richmond. I can be as doting in an old shipyard as are others in the cloisters of their old school-house. The junk and lumber and the tradition affect me. There are ghosts about. I cannot believe there is much that London reveals by chance to the curious, or even to the cunning, which hints her story with deeper implications than that show of the Thames from Duke Shore, of Limehouse. On

one hand is the reach of the Lower Pool, and on the other is Blackwall Reach beginning the loop about the Isle of Dogs. The day is grey, the tide full, the ships pass, and there smoulders modern London, obscure and grim, where the labour of the Nobodies keeps our chimneys smoking, and feeds with oil the light for our rare midnight studies. How could even a stranger come in with the flood tide, and approach that immense and central gloom which seems not a city but an ominous darkening of the heavens, a warning of the dubious enterprise of beings who have rebelled against the light and have doused even the sunset into smoking anger, and not be awed by the greatness of it, by the shadow of a tradition he does not know? But the tradition of that city, though darkness is its sign, is not ignoble, for the artless souls who made it, and who still keep its fires, cannot be said to have laboured only for pay. They must have felt, though from what instinct we shall never know, that man must live by more than what goes into his mouth. They will endure for a ghostly idea, and perish for it, just as though they were Christian souls. We have witnessed that, in recent years.

Now consider their lot. Stroll about the streets that run down to Duke Shore, or make a long journey through the stony barren which lies between Stepney, Canning Town, Bow, and Stratford. It came, that wilderness of houses, out of the spirit which sent Drake round the world, sought the North-West Passage, built the Blackwall frigates and our first ironclad, sailed the clippers, and made those conquests of the elements of which the Red Ensign is the symbol. In a little public garden by the river, near Wapping, there is a tablet testifying to the relations of the place with Drake, Martin Frobisher, and Henry Hudson. August names! The people beyond that garden are of the same stock. I declare I cannot believe they have the nature which can be bribed for ever by a dole into content with asphalt. It is an outrage on the mind, this Dockland, whatever its splendid tradition. If those shipping parishes where multitudes of our fellows live a parched existence in sacrifice to an old renown is the best that our wealth and invention can afford, then what is industrial civilisation worth? We have, in twenty centuries, added nothing but material conquests to the story of Rome. The brazen glow at sunset on the

macadam of arid streets might be the reflection of the light which guides us.

In a study of Dickens, Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch quotes a confession Dickens made to Forster concerning the lad who worked in Chandos Street: "It is wonderful to me how I could have been so easily cast away at such an age. It is wonderful to me that even after my descent into the poor little drudge I had been since we came to London no one had compassion on me—a child of singular abilities, quick, eager, delicate, and soon hurt bodily or mentally—to suggest that something might have been spared, as certainly it might have been, to place me at a common school. . . . No one made any sign." Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch remarks: "Terrible words those: the more terrible for being, after long repression, uttered so judicially." The delicate boy who had it in him to create another London, atmosphere and all, and to people it with men and women more vivid and salient than most of those we know, was there in a warehouse, rolling in pain on the straw under the counter, while Bob Fagin filled empty blacking bottles with hot water, and applied relays of them to the body of the miserable little urchin.

Pickwick and the rest of it had a narrow shave. But this was part of Dickens' education. It taught him some truths about warehouses and other places in great cities, where we do not know that children may be half-starved and in pain under counters and in odd corners, and would rather not hear about it. None of our business, of course, if a Bob Fagin is saving, as well as a rough and ignorant lad may, something for the commonwealth as important as Westminster Abbey. "Q" says to us: "Are you sure that Dickens was the better for a starved childhood?"

Well, feeding genius with blacking bottles seems hardly a nourishing way of doing it. We might have spared one potential but indifferent bishop or politician from the playing-fields of Eton if it were really essential that the blacking required the attention of a child, and have condemned him to the straw under the counter in Chandos Street; for we will assume that the straw and the starvation were ordained to a righteous end, were in the inviolable and beautiful order of Nature, and that some babe had to be immolated. As to that, I don't know so well as I might know if I were a political economist

or a theologian. Sir Arthur, of course, is in no doubt. He judges that no child is the better for that outrage by society on its body and soul. What we have to decide is whether genius, or talent, or even the common soul, is improved if it be scarified or starved of light and care.

But does it improve anything to harm it? Would it improve even a flat-iron to pour acid over it? The simple word for all the excuses we offer for our neglect of those whose work most benefits humanity is cant. If in our slovenly ordering of our communal affairs we cherish naval bases but sell Bramhall Hall for firewood, we cannot escape the implication: we are barbarians, after all. No doubt, on the very day when Bob Fagin was doing his innocent best to save Pickwick for us, there were pre-ordained and earnest consultations in Whitehall to decide whether a grenadier's tunic should have four or five buttons, or something equally momentous. It would not be true to say that we are not interested; our interest in some matters is astonishing and our pertinacity in pursuit of what excites our curiosity is awful, in the right sense of the word. But it appears we must have far to go yet when we are

indifferent to the possible loss of a young soul capable of expressing mind beyond what we may guess, and yet take care that no soldier's gaiter may exist imperfectly. Perhaps overloaded or unseaworthy ships, and picturesque but deadening slums, may not be in the nature of things, but exist merely because we carelessly wish things so. Fatuous calamity and streets in which body and soul are starved are but peeps into the nature of our usual opinions. We are like that. Such things are natural because they are true to what we are.

CHAPTER XIV

London, during one phase of the war, scared the authorities as badly as did the Western Front when, somewhat later, Ludendorff looked like getting through to the sea. Their Importances began to consider for what length of time, should sea communications be cut, the provisions stored in London's warehouses would feed its people. It appears that till then nobody had given the matter a thought. Attention was drawn to the problem by German submarines.

The prophet who trusted to the ravens had far more reason for confidence than the citizen of this era who measures his civic boast to the dimensions of his city. We may hope, for mankind is a buoyantly trusting species seldom surprised by an ugly experience into a resolve that it shall never happen again, that the authorities have not recovered from their fright. We may hope, and yet it is absurd to suppose that Londoners, or any other body of busy people who have enough to do between the

morning and the evening trains, ever give a thought to the sources from which they are supplied with food, clothing, and warmth. The pearls and match-boxes of gold in Bond Street, the alluring display behind Oxford Street's plate-glass, the value which the estate office of the Duke of Westminster declares attaches to the mould of Westminster, all such phenomena, earnest of London's attraction, wealth, and permanence, are accepted by us as though they were of a nature essentially different from the glories of Tutankamen's day.

And perhaps they are. That monarch, though supported till his death by a tradition which was thousands of years old, never read the Bible, lacked the assurance of the underground railway system, and never knew what it was to be told by an Air Minister that the problem of the next bombing attack on the capital was receiving his serious attention. Still, very many Londoners are unaware that their ancient seat of laws and commerce lives and amplifies because the tides of the ocean daily touch the heart of it. To them it is simply a great city, and not in Whitman's meaning of a great city because it has the noblest men and women, but because it takes an

electric train about an hour to run from east to west through its houses. They do not know that the capital of so powerful an Empire is yet an organism of so delicate a nature that, like a coral reef, should the tides which have favoured it deflect, flow otherwise, or lose their comforting temperature, its healthy plasm might go limp over wide areas. London, like the reef, is renewed daily by salt water. The greater the magnitude of any port, the greater its potential peril.

No modern city renews its life from within by its own heart and virtue. The time when a battlemented city could live for itself alone, peculiar and challenging, is past. Left to itself, London, like any other European community, must perish. For a proud civic or a national spirit, in its exclusiveness, working only for its own profit and security, may thus lose them, now that the earth has become for humanity at last a measurable globe. Man will continue to divide his planet with jealous and exacting frontiers at his peril. Finance, commerce, and industry have little concern with frontiers, for they must trust, as things have grown to be, on such remote springs for their refreshment and health that the

interruptions of dead mediæval lumber, of ideas that should be in the Tower with the armour and the executioner's block, may check or corrupt their life-streams.

We may not enjoy showing goodwill to folk with dubious names, but we must give some effort to the task and we might succeed with practice, which will be fortunate for us, because abroad our traditional argument with guns is beginning to look as weak as a snow man in spring. There was a time when a gunboat could overawe a community of recalcitrant Mongols on a river bank and exact silver ingots and a trade concession as compensation. That is so no longer. Light spreads ; and a gunboat can do nothing with a boycott, for that is an intellectual conception on which shells can find no target ; and a boycott, most destructive to British investments and trade, may arise from nothing more than an impatience, no longer to be suppressed, with the casual effrontery of uniformed gentlemen who have lost count of the years, do not know now where the world is, and who, unluckily, happen to be British. The history of humanity has taken another turn. Its traditions to-day are often no more than old chrysalid cases, relics

in the litter of its affairs to show what once lived there, but now exists in another form. Thoughts are changing, and things change with them. The old channels of trade flow with diminished streams, or are dry. Even old gods are in the lumber-room; and perhaps the earnest plea that it is only our elder statesmen who foolishly worship the old gods may not excuse us. The consequences of the failure of a vast community to learn that what once gave health to it has changed in its nature may be left to the imagination of the excellent folk who dream such nightmares as Red Perils. It would never do to picture them here.

Imponderable causes, either unknown or despised in Whitehall, not estimated in the arguments of either Adam Smith or Sir Allan Smith, are making differences in the accounts of profit and loss in Leadenhall Street, Liverpool, and Glasgow. Even the weightiest metal of the Admiralty, that ancient argument of ours, no longer can help us; the Admiralty, for that matter, might remove to the Tower and fill the moat again if the idea of an excluding ditch can still give it any comfort. Even East-end children have learned of late years that there is no comfort

to be got from the thought of a surrounding ditch. Europe, though we continue to refuse to see it so, is an entity, with its cities, like ganglia, all quickened with connecting nerves of railway metal and unceasing ships. If we do not know what happens to those masses of connective tissue when the nerves are cut and the limbs are sundered, then on what last catastrophe are we to wait for the lesson, a lesson from which we may expect no profit? The Customs officers and the soldiers who infest the frontiers with tariffs and bayonets merely hinder the flow of life. They are a destroying nuisance which Europe must abolish. Proud isolation now is impossible, or as silly as the man who cut off his house from the water-supply because the company's engineer was a Jew.

CHAPTER XV

The changes have been unremarked in their unfolding. A crisis in their growth, when a consequence of our activities becomes an obvious wonder, receives as a rule but the open-mouthed astonishment of fundamentalists, who look at it as though it had come suddenly full-bodied from Heaven. The sudden explosion of torpedoes and the sinking of ships may be only alarms to show that our methods of reasoning, however seemingly sound and inevitable, do not always induce godsends. It could be shown, too, that the shipping combines of this year are the inevitable outcome of Fulton's *Planet*. The oddity of driving a ship by controlled steam instead of by the variable winds had in it the fact that fleets of steamers, though immensely more costly to build, could be more easily and economically managed than sailing ships. Steam was a factor which made it possible for finance to secure the control of overseas transport.

There was a time, not more than forty years

ago, when a ship's house-flag was the symbol of a personality as well as the trade-mark of a line. There was a wide choice of owners, almost as wide as the choice in master mariners, and just as varied. The mind of each owner was reflected in his property and his service. In the first steamship, directed inevitably as it was towards the control of tonnage by money power, was inherent also a change in the demeanour of seamen towards their house-flags. Loyalty to a symbol was doomed, because the symbol in the end no longer represented a person or a family. So our men nowadays, as we are frequently told, take no pride in their ship. They have a regrettable modern habit of measuring service by the coinage. They are contumacious. They meet a combine of masters with a combine of servants. They show an unworthy impatience with discipline. One could point easily enough to a deeper fall from grace than these late vices indicate, but they will serve to show that I am not an apologist for the men. We should take no sides vehemently when discussing biological evidence.

It is true that men are not so good as they were if we regard them as ministrants to the

welfare of the flags of the houses of their masters. Yet even to-day you will find that seamen speak with respect of some of our house-flags, and you will always learn that under those flags the directing men and the men who work the ships touch one another. There are owners who consider their crews as hulls and engines are considered. There is something better in their bargains than mere conformity to the instructions of the Merchant Shipping Acts. The men get more than their legal rights. These owners break even the tradition of the forecastle with its shelves of bunks and bad ventilation, and berth the crew aft and in cabins, with a messroom, bathrooms, and a library. Do not smile at the library. The men use it, and the bath.

Seamen are like ourselves. They see as we do the questionable aspect of a world that has changed in their own day. They are wondering what is meant by the revelations of these later years. They are anxious to share in whatever access of light there may be. Only recently I was travelling in such a ship. Her library was in charge of the purser ; it was indexed, it had a cabin to itself, and it contained three hundred volumes of poetry and drama, science, essays,

novels, biography, travel, and history. It seemed to me that the books had been selected by those who knew what they were about. A book was there which years ago I had been constrained to write. "I should like to know how often that book has been out," I said to the librarian.

"It hasn't been out," he replied. "Not yet," he added hastily and kindly.

"And now tell me," I said, hoping for good company in this neglect, how often this book has been out." I pointed to Dante's *Inferno*.

The purser went to his register. "Twice," he reported. "The cook had it out, and one of his boys."

What was surprising in the record of the reading done on that ship was the thirst for knowledge shown by the men. I do not pretend that knowledge is a modern substitute for beer, but at least our men betrayed a desire for it. And they did not always read for relaxation, like those tired business men who have the warm sympathy of us all when they protest that after a strenuous day they must read only what is light, as they call it, or break down. Business men do not work harder than firemen ; yet some of our firemen, when away from the furnaces, read

Shakespeare and Keats. If many firemen and their kind take to reading with fair persistency the variety of books I saw on that ship, then business men, much too wearied to read what is good, will have to invent a pastime which will serve as an equivalent for mental activity, or their difficulties with labour may increase. Perhaps even a ship and her engines do better when handled with intelligent goodwill. There may be reasons, so impeccable that even a chartered accountant would pass them, for wise shipowners to act as though the human mechanism were no less potent and were just as worthy of study as are the latest explosive engines.

But what is shipowning to-day for the most part? Most of the master mariners and chief engineers in our mercantile marine could no more name their owners than a child at school could name the members of the Board of Education. Their ships are moved about by what appears to be impersonal fate. These sailors never know anyone beyond superintending captains and engineers, and managers who are themselves, clearly enough, as susceptible to impersonal but irrevocable decrees as was a common soldier in the line. What one might call humane qualifications never change

those decrees any more than loving-kindness changes the elements of the Antartic. Finance, which now controls industry and commerce, is lunar in its complete isolation from what is human, though it moves the tides by which men live or die. Sailors are vaguely aware of some great figure in the background, altogether too important to see so small a thing as a captain, or a single ship, for that inimical figure is concerned not so much with men and a line of ships as with the tonnage of many lines and with labour supply. The thoughts of that figure are in terms of power, of which labour, with its inventive skill, fidelity to duty, skilled intelligence, and so on, is but a term in its estimates. These great controllers rarely see their ships, unless, perhaps, it is the latest spectacular liner, on the day when she is proudly displayed to a marvelling public. They are concerned, those few great figures, not so much with ships as with monopoly of the trade routes. Not so much with men as with the powers to which men must submit.

Personality is lost in diffused and delegated administration. One might as well expect men to feel an affection for the solar system as for a modern line of ships. It is the way of ordinary

mortals to forget that an impersonal system, such as a planetary array, too remote and immense for common feelings and plain duties to have any effect upon it, requires from us any more affection than an old-age pensioner feels for the bank-rate. That deplorable indifference, which results in perfunctory workmanship, cannot be helped. Systems do not wear a recognisable white top-hat, as did old Willis who owned the *Cutty Sark*.

At one time, when first I had business with ships, you could travel about the docks of London and name the men who owned the ships after glancing at their flags or funnels. But not to-day, unless you study the financial press closer than do most of us. All that can be done to-day, when one is admiring the fleets of big steamers in the lower docks of the Thames, is to name the few gentlemen who now, to an important extent, own the Red Ensign. One may glance at a flag and name a probable controller at a venture. Nor is that all. These same combines, expanded of late years with the profits of the war, include shipyards, graving docks, collieries, coaling stations, and even the establishments which supply ships with stores.

It is as idle to complain of this concentration of interests as to abuse the men who work the ships because they have lost an old respect for the flag under which they work and their ardour for its welfare. We must accept both as phenomena inevitable in the evolution of commerce and industry. It is even absurd to expect that working folk, which means, of course, captains and engineers, will retain their pride in a flag and make sacrifices for its maintenance aloft, when they know it represents but a power which itself is as soulless as a hard frost ; a power on which the most humane and reasonable feeling would have no more effect than on the sea itself.

Men submit to the complex machinery of modern industrial society, but they do not love it. As they know now, in their bones, it is folly to waste ardours and endurances for the sake of it. Men have found reason to watch in horror the movements of the imperial State itself as though it were a mechanical monster in whose revolving cogs reason had no place. All good workers are artists, in an important sense, and when they feel at last their pride is wasted on a vast and sightless engine, they no longer give devotion, but merely do what they

must, and not a damned tap more. Nothing whatever would happen if they gave more. That loss to our commerce, to the very life of the community, of the finest virtue of good workmen, is something which must be accepted, as we accept the tendency of shipowning to become merely a feature of money power. There is no escape from either, and one goes with the other.

There is still a great variety of house-flags in the port of London, but there is not so much variety in ownership. There will be less presently. There seems no reason why, in the future, the Red Ensign should not be the only house-flag, and that symbol neatly folded and secure in the pocket of a Napoleon of ships.

CHAPTER XVI

"Well," said the man opposite to me in the train, "if I could get out of the country I would. Too old now. But I've packed my boy off. This place is no good for bright lads. Nothing for them here."

We were running at night north of Durham. A surprising complaint to hear in Northumbria. Nothing for clever children there? The man was staring through the window at lights which appeared to be piled vertically in the night. English civilisation might be said to have had its beginnings somewhere in that darkness. "You see," said the fellow, turning to me again, "I'm a shipwright." He looked like that. A big man when sitting, though short when he stood, a gaze that was direct and searching, yet kindly, from under thickets of tawny eye-brows, a quiet voice deliberate in a powerful throat, and the clothes of one who is mindful of his appearance, but must make the best of what he has in hard times. His hands were hairy and freckled.

Men like my friend, perhaps, have formed the hard and resisting body of English life through all our history. When things were well, we never knew they were there. When things went ill, we fell back on them, the only security which would never fail us. They never have failed us. They alone saved us in the last emergency. So when an elderly Tyneside shipwright spoke as did my friend in the train, I wondered whether his words might not be more significant than the gravest warning by the Premier. "I've been out of work too long, and my boy's away," he said. "I reckon shipwrights ought not to be out of work on the Tyne. Anyhow, not so many of us. Days when you can't hear hammers. Seems as if the bottom has dropped out. Don't they want new ships? If they don't . . . " The man spread his hands apart, and then rubbed his jaw.

Things were warmer and more comforting in the Newcastle hotel, however, where prosperity was signalled in the three shillings and sixpence which was asked for a whisky-and-soda. I could see no evidence there that new ships were not still required by England, and was glad of it, because one should not dwell on such ideas too

long. The ormolu of the pillars in the dining-room was untarnished. That gilt was most reassuring. A party of young people at a near table clearly had no call to emigrate. The ladies among them were cordial even to strangers with brief and intimate gauze, and so I could easily forget an elderly shipwright, whose boy has left the country and who is troubled because England does not need his skill. The drowsy music of stringed instruments dispelled my fears. What was the noise of hammers to that?

Nobody enjoys the noise of hammers, even when it can be heard. The reputation of British shipwrights and engineers is not so well known at home, perhaps, as that of the Savoy band, but some foreigners respect it in the way they do that of the British sailor. Once when the behaviour of a ship surprised me I complained to her French captain. "Come," he said, and took my arm. Presently he stopped, and pointed without a word to a brass-plate on a casing of his ship. It bore a famous British name. "She is very good," he said. "But the cargo, that is bad."

Well, in the city of Newcastle next morning I learned that thirty in every hundred of the

Tyneside shipwrights are idle men. The fine edge of a traditional skill is blunting through disuse, and Tyneside lads are not anxious to be apprenticed to the trade of their fathers. The lesson has gone home this time. The State may make the ultimate demand on a man, and claim even his life, when things are desperate under gun-fire. It will then resolve any dubiety he may have with a declaration of fellowship in a common cause. But when our affairs are safe again the State at once defaults, and is no more than the guardian of the material wealth which has been preserved and even increased. The shipwright, or whatever the man is, may then stand in the bread-line, if there is any bread to be distributed, while the police keep the line attenuated and quiet. Victory has that taste to many men. They spit it out. And their boys, their interest in their own place doused, get away from it, if they can. The lesson this time has gone home to countless English firesides. The fermenting despair and the resentment are, when we calculate the chances of the nation's industrial revival, factors as important as the gold standard or the other grave abstractions. When some observers report what

they call war-weariness in the workers, they mean the same thing. The faith has been lost that our cause is common.

For many years there has been no ship-building worth mentioning at our southern ports. The response of the shipwrights and engineers to our commerce comes chiefly from the North, from the Tyne, the Clyde, and Belfast ; and yet in one important shipyard of the North I was told that though once their list of lads who were waiting outside for a chance to learn the use of the tools was usually hundreds long, there is now no list of names and not an apprentice in the yard.

To the citizen who knows nothing of ships, the titles of our leading shipyards mean nothing, but they sound importantly enough along the waterfront of every port in the outer world—Harland & Wolff, Swan Hunter, Armstrong Whitworth, Cammell Laird, Doxford, William Gray, Vickers, the Fairfield, Beardmore, Brown's, Barclay Curle, Hawthorne Leslie, and many more. The call to-day of our commerce upon all this concentration of science and machinery needs but two-thirds of its strength. Yet nobody knows why with any exactitude. Commerce

itself may seem at times to grow brighter, with a low dawn of optimism, a dawn which may be false, because a nation that is spending much more than it is receiving is still, in all probability, somewhere about the middle of the night ; but there is not enough light in the industry of building ships to show a way through this chapter. Yet something must be done about it, though neither the owners of ships nor the builders of ships—not infrequently they are the same men—have any useful counsel to offer us.

They are not showing now that energy and boldness with which they responded to the demands of the war. Perhaps their eyes remain fixed in a direction where nothing now may be seen, except the bogles of the timid and hysterical. Shipbuilders should not expect any more to have their yards full of warships and cruisers in embryo, with destroyers and submarines tucked away wherever space offers between the greater hulls and the footpaths. That is past. That will never happen again, unless it comes to stop our hammers for ever. Peace must keep the yards busy. But the ways of peace are different. They are ways which cannot be found by men with minds inclined to

war. It may be that our men of business, who found a new civilisation here when they came, but thought it was ancient and of all time, never troubled in their ignorance to learn what secret energies moved modern Europe. There the industries were, working at full pressure. Why bother? Society had the appearance of the inevitability of the order of Nature. It gave unquestioning confidence; it would, of course, go on for ever. Our men of business did not know that even our leading statesmen had never shown any curiosity over the springs of this last exuberant phase of humanity's history, which came of science applied to iron, coal, and oil. They were unaware that all the complexity of the Europe we know has developed in fewer years than it took the prehistoric nomads of the steppes to learn that horses could be mounted. The civilisation of industrial science, nevertheless, is so recent a curiosity that it has expanded over the earth in fewer years than it took Egypt to fill the tombs of a dynasty or two. Yet calamity so soon has stricken that society. Its gearing is displaced, and nobody appears to know what will get the machinery running freely again. Few people had ever

bothered much about the ideas which first set it spinning, and the anxious protests of those rare critics were only like prayers the horrified might address to a runaway lorry. Now that the woeful are trying to raise the wreckage of war into life again with incantatory platitudes over it, our men of business, like our politicians, because they know of nothing better to offer, merely repeat the incantations.

It may be that the ideas which originally circulated that network of gearing will never get it to move freely again, for it is not the machinery which is dead so much as the desires of men, desires which but recently were so urgent. They may not know what they want now ; but they know they do not want that machinery to be run for the old reasons to the old purpose. Acquisitiveness and dirt, however high their dividends, may never again inspire humanity to do its best.

While waiting for the stirring of new life, the shipbuilders sit patiently, looking to the shipowners for orders. But shipowners are moved to order by the need for more tonnage, and they say there is too much tonnage afloat already. Many great ships are still anchored in

sheltered places, with watchmen in charge, waiting for fairer times. The matter is still further complicated by the cost of building new tonnage. That is not easy to reduce to a lesser figure, because the shipbuilders, like the shipowners, have burdened their charges with the war's ornately decorative capital sums, represented now only by expanded yard areas equipped with new machinery which cannot be used. Steel is the raw material for shipbuilding, and its price is dependent on the price of coal and the cost of transport, both of which are too high, we are told, though neither provides a wage on which a man may certainly raise a family of robust children.

Then again shipbuilding, as an industry, is a minor affair when compared with the money invested in shipowning. It is but an adjunct to shipowning, and therefore the greater shipowners are intimately concerned with shipbuilding yards, which they prefer should do nothing, as things are. But the workhouse is not a likely substitute for a shipyard, nor does the traditional skill in ship construction seem a desirable export from a maritime nation to another continent. We might be well advised to persuade our stout

Northumbrian lads to stay here and allow to America only the refuse of Epsom Downs and Newmarket Heath. It may be an indication of the essential health of a nation of seafarers, which still may be sound at its heart, when its race-courses are busy though its shipyards are silent. One would not like to say for certain, for perhaps the political economists could justify, on grounds unknown to us, what otherwise would appear to be a lapse in intelligence.

Newcastle is a city which coal and iron has made out of Roman and Early Christian origins. The city and its region have been for some centuries re-dedicated to pagan gods. The labours of the first Christian missionaries were lost. Newcastle might be the capital of Thor, grim, veiled in smoke, and as fantastic, in some lights, as a citadel in Norse legend. It huddles in crags of brick-work high over its swift river. Dark walls descend in terraces to a flood which bears rafts of foam from its upper reaches. Precipitous steps drop from an upper road to the quays, past squalid tenements which are about to collapse, and some that have fallen into heaps of sooty rubble. Down on the quays, under the city, you might be in a narrow chasm, the rocks of which have weathered

by chance into the simulacrum of human handiwork. The sun glints on faint apparitions of upper roofs, but mist and smoke hide whatever the roofs may rest upon. And in mid-air, on a bridge floating so high that it gets most of the daylight, a diminished locomotive pauses for a signal, with its funnel so near to the wan sun that its leisurely cloud of steam almost puts out the light.

From Newcastle to Tynemouth along the river, while passing the slum yards, refuse dumps, and chemical works, a traveller may question whether our labours in the past have contributed anything to the world that was worth doing. The doubt comes to him that an ideal which compelled the conversion of the earth into the semblance of a rubbish heap, where humanity subsists in hovels clustered round over-lording machinery, may have somewhere in it a diabolical cheat that leads to the destruction of a better treasure than it creates. There, anyhow, is the benefit of the wealth to English folk of their industry and commerce. We see the result of the Industrial Revolution. It took us two centuries of unremitting toil to give this land the prospect of the Plutonian Shore and its

people the security of the workhouse. Was that worth while?

By North Shields, at the mouth of the Tyne, I heard the automatic tools chattering again on the plates of ships. It was a cheering sound, though this was but repair work. Yet what have those busy hammers made of North Shields in the past, when their noise was continuous? The town, as a product of English religion, science, and wealth, like so many of its kind by the fruitful sea, is inferior as a dwelling-place to the kasbah of Algiers. Nobody would live in it who could choose a Malay hut instead. In some areas of the town the three golden balls of the pawnbrokers hang so abundantly in the streets that they might be the chief crop of the town, always ripe. Outside its employment bureau the many listless men, when I passed them, looked like an open-air meeting which they were attending because there was nothing else to do, though they did not expect to hear anything that would interest them.

It is not easy to come to dogmatic conclusions in this period of our history, but when returning from Shields I was passing the Cathedral of St Nicholas, in Newcastle. I remembered that he

is the patron saint of sailors and children, and here he was, keeping a forlorn outpost still in the land of Thor and Odin. Not that I had any hope that he could help me, even if he were at home, but at least his house would be an escape from the present, which had become too insistent. On one of the church pillars I read this advice : "The Cathedral stands in this busy city witnessing to the presence of God in our midst. It is here to help us by the beauty, peace, and spirit of prayer which dwells within it. . . . Let all who come within its walls remember in prayer men who work in dangerous occupations, such as sailors, soldiers, airmen, miners, railway men, and shipyard workers and others, and all children, especially those who are homeless and orphaned."

It is not sound political economy, but at least it looks more comely than dirt and the balls of pawnbrokers.

CHAPTER XVII

A JOURNEY from one region of industry to the next, from one agglomeration of shipyards, factories, wharves, gasometers, slums, and bank-buildings to another, does not cheer a traveller to watch eagerly for signs of their prosperous continuance. Towards the end of it such a journey sloughs into a deepening mortification. Is there a good reason for the continuance of these places? They do not appear to be improvements on the aboriginal wilderness. They suggest little beyond the cave-dwellings and the middens. They are but elaborations of the caves; the men inside have but sharpened the arrowhead into a torpedo, improved on the tom-tom as a signal, added to the heaps of cowries, and conjured more craftily with fire. Smudge and muddle, and haste without direction, have made them huge but without form and as dark as whatever purposes inspire them. They look as though we had been working with most of the mind asleep and unable to understand

what we had done when it was there, for the Glasgow tenements would sicken a savage who had the freedom of a beach. Yet maybe it is proper to shut out sunlight when we settle down, with but a few eager instincts awake, industrially to impoverish life. Our exquisite machines thrive parasitically on human vitality. They shine with exactitude through a studied care which neglects the mind of which they were born. Our great cities came of an ideal that was never troubled by the doubt that perhaps it were not well to barter joy for chain-making. These cities therefore were still-born. They lack the human warmth which becomes brotherhood in daring enterprise. They cannot live ; they can but expand as interments for still further abandonments of beauty and happiness.

That they are the material show of human desires is a dismaying thought. Then is this all ? Yet they are. They are what we wanted. You cannot stay long by the Clyde without learning why men hate one another there. Glasgow itself is the result of war, and the defeated are in the tenements. For how long ? Because the war, necessarily, is not over.

I remember, very early in another war, visiting

the Clyde because a calamitous strike had begun. The workers would not meet even the officials of their trade unions, so it was not easy for them to meet me. I was, of course, another enemy to them, though I liked the look of that group of sullen machine tenders. I told them that I had but recently returned from Ypres—it was just after the first battle—and that their shopmates were perishing for the lack of what Glasgow could easily give.

"Now, see," said one of them, "whenever they want us to do more than the job, they always yarn that way. They call it appealing to our better nature."

I told them I was not concerned with that; and they listened then to some of the facts out of the Ypres salient, and were silent awhile. Then one of them, making his points with the stem of his pipe against my coat, confessed a little. They had surrendered their union rules that Ypres might be better strengthened, but their masters were taking advantage of the surrender for private gain.

This was serious. This was hardly different from the ugly word Treachery. I went forthwith to one of the greater masters and told him

of this charge. He did not answer it. He said calmly, "If there had been no war, there would have been one over those rules of theirs, and I would have made it." Those sullen fellows had reason to know their masters better than indignant critics.

The Clyde was not fashioned for the good of a common cause. Its people were not a community, but groups contending over any spoil which might come that way. How much to each? When at last a sense of the commonweal was all that could save us from disaster, the traditional bickering of the counting-house was the only way by which man could communicate with man. There was no other token of interest. A man may chaffer over the money he is to get for building a warship in a hurry, but the fellow who takes her out in a hurry to meet the enemy's guns must do that in the sacrificial spirit which looks to no reward but the sea bottom. You should die for the commonweal, but you would be a fool if you lived for it.

We should not blame one contentious group more than the other, unless, as is very likely, we prefer to. It is easy to admire both masters and

men. They may feel self-interest too keenly: they are rigid and tireless in argument; but both, we will recall, have solid qualities which kept hope flickering, when the day was going badly elsewhere, because in one part of the deafening line a Scottish Division, though its signals were infrequent, appeared to have made up its mind that it would stay where it was. Here again we may note that it appears as if a quality is a virtue or a vice according to whether it comforts us or not at a given time.

Those appalling days of war, demanding ardours in unison which went far to put old feuds out of memory, are gone, with even the sense they kindled that though it would be rather silly, when there was time for it, to lay a brick or two of the New Jerusalem, yet amity perhaps was worth considering. I had not been in a Scottish shipyard since the days when warships grew there in a night, so when a friend, a mariner, who knew this famous yard, would have taken me through its portals, I doubted the welcome. Things have changed. Yet there was no need for doubt, especially as I have a genuine interest in the models of ships, which the chief of the yard casually indicated as we passed them. He

would not, of course, betray his pride in them. They were ships whose names all sailors know, and his yard built them. He was, without doubt, a formidable captain of the hosts; one would not engage him in controversy without a strict scrutiny beforehand of one's evidence. My partiality for his models, and some knowledge of their virtues, got the door open of a private locker in which he keeps cordials that are specially labelled. There can be no question of Scottish hospitality once you have been admitted. Round the walls of that room the portraits of shipbuilders and engineers of other days looked down on us. That man invented one thing. This man another. My host named them. And he could be as casual as he pleased, but I recognised those inventions as revolutionary in marine engineering. Here the now dominant engine-god was born, though its annunciation has not been celebrated by the poets. These men went far to make the ships and commerce over which the Red Ensign floats. Those portraits were of master builders of the British Merchant Service. You do not hear so much of such men as of great admirals, but they have done more for us. In many matters I fear my host would have

differed from me with violence, but I liked him well.

When going from that yard by tram to Glasgow I sat next to a worker who was probably a shipwright, so I remarked to him that the weather was bad. He did not answer at once. After a time he took his pipe from his mouth. "Not so bad," he said. I had guessed he was a shipwright. He was. He was also a Communist. I would as soon have faced his master in a dispute as that man. He knew all about it, as by plenary inspiration. We got to talk of ships at last, and I imagined then he changed a little. I mentioned one I had seen.

"Man," he said roundly, "that's a bonny ship." He spoke of her as though he owned her. But he had only helped to build her.

So there does appear to be that much common ground for the master builder and his men; something on which to begin. We might build on that if we knew the way. For there is no doubt that what is lacking is not so much the orders for ships as a sense of fellowship. Glasgow would be no better if it got the orders. The war would but continue over them. The inventions of the engineers and naval architects have

resulted in but dividends, the tenements, and social strife. It is becoming clear to us that a long-continued concentration upon mechanics may put out the light of the mind. The engine may be perfect and the man its slave, bodily and in spirit, and not know it.

CHAPTER XVIII

The shipbuilder told us that not a tender went out of that office to-day which was not down to near cost price.

At this my friend the master mariner exclaimed derisively. "Don't talk like that. It's unlucky. Remember where you are. Think of your Scotch name." But the shipbuilder remained firmly virtuous. He protested. "I'm telling you. Anything," he said, "to keep the yard alive. Every week one of the Clyde yards of the war-time goes out of business. No yard will ever work to its full capacity again."

"Well, why should it?" said the skipper. "During the war you made every mud-flat a slipway. We shall never have finished paying for what went down the ways here then."

"Aye. But you wanted it? You felt better when your transport was escorted? Answer me that."

"That's right. But I'm not saying there were too many warships then. I'm saying that

you can't expect the Clyde yards now to work to their full capacity again. What did you do? You got new land for an abnormal job, you covered it with new machinery, you decorated the company with a heavy scroll-work of new capital, and now there you sit talking of full capacity. Get rid of the scroll-work."

"I dream of that at night. You'd know it better if you attended our Board meetings. I've told you we don't expect new merchant tonnage to employ all our new gear. But what are your people doing, the shipowners? Where's their orders? Look at the yard, with two steamers building in it."

"Our house-flag did its best for you. We lost every liner. They all went downstairs. They've all been rebuilt, at the top price."

"But the Government paid, didn't it? And a lot more than they were worth."

"Part of the game. But, anyway, our company did not buy War Bonds with the compensation, but new tonnage, through the nose. A big line can't wait for better days. The flag has to be kept flying. The big lines have been keeping the routes open for British trade while some shipowners that you know and I know have retired to country

estates to rest on the 5 per cent. which a fool public pays them because they made fortunes out of the war. They don't need to do any ship-owning now. War profits became War Bonds, and now it would be violating God knows what to touch those bonds. They live on the best principles of parasitism. There it is. We have to earn £300,000,000 every year for the people who invested in the war before we may think of paying our own rent."

"All right. I know it. There are too many people in this country still living comfortably on the war. What with the thought of the boys that won't come back and the people who are all the better for it . . . but have another drink. It isn't good to think about that. No good expecting men with War Bonds to buy ships with them. Men are not like that. Patriotism turns to bunk when money touches it. Why can't you persuade those who do own ships to replace their obsolete tonnage?"

"All the ships under our flag are new. But have you been up to Garelochhead? There's a fleet of tonnage anchored there waiting for work. What's the good of building more? To send it to Gare Loch?"

"A lot of it ought to be at Gare Loch. Never at sea. Those ships might do for Noah. They will never pay as cargo-carriers, not with that gear. I wouldn't buy them for old metal. You know how they were built. In a hurry, during the war. Cost didn't matter. Gear didn't matter. Rush them out quick. Now here they are, and you wonder shipowners can't figure paying freights on them, eating up coal, and giving seven knots. And Germany building motor-ships."

"Why, yes, the bright politicians collared two million German tons, to please the vicious old women, and put the British shipwright on the dole. And there the Germans are, building modern craft. But we've got the old tonnage, anyhow, when there is not much cargo. You haven't seen the American rivers. Talk of Gare Loch! There's enough ships on the other side, growing grass on deck, to choke the Clyde. And every time freights begin to rise, some American, some hairdresser, or funeral furnisher, or ice-cream merchant, gets hold of a few of the rusting stuff from the Shipping Board and is paid a commission on their gross earnings. That's the sort of thing

a shipowner has to look at when you talk of building."

"Well, I'm telling you. Now here you are. There's all that truck afloat, and it puts freights where they do not pay. Those ships will never pay. They waste money and time, and the first thing is to cut it from the wages of the officers and men. Isn't that so? You're a ship's master. Am I right? And lower wages won't save the shipowners. They won't save this yard. Nothing will save us till we've got rid of the dunnage, the people who live on us without helping us, the ships that are no good for the job, and the notions which ought to be on the scrap heap."

CHAPTER XIX

The morning was early, and the ship was making fast to a Belfast quay. I like Belfast, for reasons as sentimental as an Ulsterman's, though I should never attempt to display them in a public bar of that city. An Englishman is as distinct a foreigner in Ireland, whether he is visiting Belfast or Galway, as though he were in Timor. There is no surprise in the difference in Timor, but in Ireland, where he goes confidently as though to a distant and peculiar corner of his own country, he is presently surprised by a look or a word to which he has no clue, and the shock of the unexpected difference is a sudden awakening.

When I was in Belfast last it was the end of July 1914. Two of us—the other man was a special correspondent of the *Manchester Guardian* —had gone from our hotel to the Post Office. My friend had a long telegram to dispatch. They were the days of gun-running. But my own attention had been distracted from those

excitements. All the interest of watching a revolution in the act of breaking had gone from me. Carson, somehow, had dwindled to the size and importance of a penny doll. I had a more ominous doubt then, a misgiving which I did not wish to be confirmed. The special correspondent discussed the chances of the revolution and lighter matters, and wondered whether he was late with his telegram. In truth, he was. It wanted but an hour to midnight.

The telegraph clerk was not as affable as usual, I noticed. He seemed pre-occupied. I could hear him muttering a little to my friend, but I did not hear his words. We left the office, and my companion, one of the cleverest and most judicious journalists I have known, his business finished, paused outside to light a cigarette. We stood under the glare of a street lamp, and splinters of rain glittered continually through its cold aura. The dark street was deserted. There was only the murmur in the gutters. When the cigarette was alight he meditated: "It seems a monstrously drastic action to take."

"What does?" I asked.

"The clerk inside has just told me. Altogether too much to stop a few gun-runners.

Do you know, the telegraphists have been calling up the Fleet Reserves all to-day ? "

Twelve years ago. For me, though my friend is dead, that night's rain is still falling through the aura of that street lamp. A few days later I was in Belgium, wondering how I could report the overthrow of Europe. And how much was implied by my friend's words ? Who knows that ? The memory of a night's rain may persist for a time ; but on what eternal verity is Belfast or any city founded ?

Here was Belfast again, after some of the implication of that casual conversation on a night long ago under one of the lights of the city has begun to take shape. Men change their minds by the compulsion of the events which they have brought to pass without conscious design ; and like dissolving views their cities change with their notions. Unluckily, they are never here long enough to mark critically the trend of the change in their affairs. When I was last in Belfast the city was so confident in its linen industry and its shipbuilding that it could afford to challenge London to a civil war, under the advice of eminent Englishmen who were quite sure then they knew what they were doing.

People talked of war in those days with the bright animation which is given by an anticipation of good luck. Well, the linen manufacturers of Belfast now have no idea of a way to change the desires of ladies who have learned to prefer silk and its substitutes to flaxen stuffs, or the taste of people who choose not to hide their dinner-tables with white sheets. As to shipbuilding, Belfast is learning, too, that when the fabric of a continental society is wrecked, the effect reaches even a self-assured community prosperously isolated on an Irish lough.

A new motor-ship was about to begin her trials while I was in the city. She was sufficient to cause Belfast to imagine that the old prosperous days would return. And there could be no doubt about the skill of the craftsmen who created that beautiful model, nor of their ingenuity in a daring nautical experiment, for her motors could develop 20,000 horse-power. She was an augury of new ships, and as noble a vessel as ever Belfast has launched. But she was not more conspicuous than the wilderness of empty slipways and gantries. The shores as we approached the quay that morning looked forlorn and glum. Where armies of workmen

once shook the air with an endless universal chorus of automatic tools fashioning steel, there was but an intermittent chant here and there in the midst of silence. It was as if the current of favour for this city had been deflected. But this, naturally enough, its citizens energetically denied. It is not easy to persuade men of changes in their circumstances, when it is more comfortable to suppose that nothing has changed. It is easy to come to the opinion we desire by ignoring all that does not accord with it.

Belfast has been the birthplace of the greater ships, but it is probable that not many more of those decorative monsters will be required for some years. Yet what will happen to Belfast, unless the tides of favour bring to her an unpredictable access of good fortune, it would not do to guess. Ireland is Europe's problem in miniature. She is a geographical and economic entity, but is politically disrupted. Her people naturally desire peace in which they may prosperously develop their own culture, but yet approach their problem with their minds determined for trouble. They are then surprised that they get the consequences of conflict, but with the solace, of course, that they have a wicked enemy to

blame for it. The channels of trade cannot flow when people, with honest hearts, in deep sincerity, unalterably convinced of the virtue of their aims, solemnly choke the channels for the love of God, or through devotion to some symbol or another. Those symbols! The Valhallas of heroes and martyrs, and the sacred and blood-stained relics of nationality, have done more to destroy the virtues they commemorated than the devices of all their foes and mockers.

I may say that with ease of conscience. I am on neither side of the Irish boundary. The means of intercourse between peoples are cumbered all over Europe for this odd reason or for that, but Ireland is a beautiful example, small and plain enough for even a member of Parliament to understand. In Ireland you will find unusually conspicuous the advertisements of the shipping companies catering for emigrants; and we cannot forget that it is youth, it is our liveliest and most eager spirits which are the first to grow impatient with us, presently to depart and to leave us to our old and indurated ways. On the other hand, my reading of the Irish press during my visits cheered my breakfasts with the impression that the Irish ratepayer is becoming

startled by the increasing cost of maintaining his mental hospitals.

Ireland, no more than Europe, may remain divided, its frontiers marked with jealous soldiers and tariffs, without paying the usual penalty. The returns of the Irish railways show heavy falls in traffic, and the last trade balance of the Free State looks as though there were an undetected hole in the bottom of the sack. As for Belfast, fortunately for that city, the English taxpayer is a generous and uncomplaining soul, under tribute, after his great victory, to the whole circle of the horizon. A few millions to Belfast is a trifle. Belfast, like the English craftsman, is on the dole.

Looking again at the map of Ireland, I have been wondering what the Ulster Government would do if the Free State, with an eye to that new world which is to come, when we are wise enough to desire it, were to plan a new Irish city on Lough Swilly, where there is an excellent deep-water harbour, with an entrance preferable to that to Londonderry. Belfast, like Dublin, can never be an important seaport. It is off the main tracks of shipping, and for its shipbuilding it must import everything. The state

of Ireland, like that of Europe, is improvident and provisional. Its future must be uncertain, while fear, which paralyses with its safeguards and animosities, is more potent than courage and its urge to bounty.

CHAPTER XX

It would be unreasonable to expect the members of our Chambers of Commerce, when they are perplexed by the unreviving body of our affairs, to turn to modern poetry for a clue to it. They might do worse, if they have any time to waste, and they say they have plenty, unluckily, as things are. Let them try to divine, as an experiment, the import of Mr T. S. Eliot's last volume of verse. There is a poem in it called "Waste Land," and another called "Hollow Men." Most of the members of such Chambers would be energetic and, as the saying goes, practical men. Not hollow men. So those poems, if they were not thought to be deliberately wayward and obscure, might even rouse a little heat. A young poet, so a shrewd man of business might protest, has something wrong with him when he views the important tasks of this world, and even himself, with such allusive but chilling derision.

This is not the place to venture a discourse on poetry ; what I should have to say of Mr Eliot's

"Hollow Men," as a quickening song, would be irrelevant here, and the artists who are in concert with him would only mock it as a contribution to letters. But I invite our men of commerce to give some attention to those hollow men of Mr Eliot's brief lines, for they are not unimportant, though they are hollow, as they themselves confess. They are a challenge. They are as embarrassing as would be the gallery for strangers in the House of Commons, if that, for our correction, were permanently occupied by an audience of hollow but admonitory men got out of the fields of Flanders, maintained above our senators merely to grin down at the important proceedings below. How the rhetoric of imperial minds would falter under those wide and unrelaxing smiles! Our hollow young men, dead and alive, are real enough, though not as obvious as a Royal procession. Their useless state may be a warning that our vitality has fallen below that youthful power in a people which responds, life being good and promising, to a call to strike tents and to continue the march.

March whither? The young men are asking that. They stand listlessly waiting for an answer. The question confuses us, for we have not

thought it out. They stand and briefly indicate what is around us, the pass to which we have brought them, and their odd smile needs no translation. Was all this worth while?

We surmise at times, though we never confess aloud so monstrous a doubt, that it was not worth while. The old incentive to gain, which once was thought a motive sufficient for any man, if he made a suitable acknowledgment to God when not otherwise occupied, is now seen to be most purely exemplified, and above the need to acknowledge any power superior to the police, in a burglar. Yet the whole library of our orthodox political economy is based upon that pure motive.

It has brought us to this pass. Now march where, and why? The spirit has gone out of the social adventure. Mr Eliot is what is called, with that hearty impatience which suggests our natural dread of the unusual, an intellectual. We may therefore safely dismiss him and relapse into the comfort which comes of ignoring a difficulty to which we know no answer. It is true, too, that he is not read by many young men, and I am glad of it, and wish that even fewer readers could see in his inter-

pretation of life that confirmation of their own refusal which pleases with its images and damaging wit. I am not to be persuaded that even my own shadow, which is cast by the day in which I am, means more than that once I was too strongly inclined to the comforting faith that my fellows preferred light to darkness. We have found they do not. One has learned of late that light requires a certain habitude for its appreciation.

We have been distressed in recent years to discover that light may rouse anger, when heightened and brightened in simple faith without warning. Light then becomes complicated with certain unexpected shadows and disclosures. Darkness may be preferable to light, and a sudden illumination may expose the reason for that preference dramatically enough. We ought to make an allowance, in these years, for disillusioned men who do not hear as plainly as formerly the voice of God in the voice of the people. It is no doubt possible for some of us, who also have lost faith in the democracy, to hail Signor Mussolini as a saviour, yet to others it is sadly plain that the creed of the Italian is but suitable for slave minds, and that it would

not feel at home and comfortable nowadays in a northern land, where there are too many irritable, red-headed, and offensive people. No hope there.

In one period of human history, I suppose, the more thoughtful youngsters, after such an experience as ours, would not have written "Hollow Men," but would have escaped from the world into monasteries; shut themselves off; devoted themselves, in a way which then would have seemed right, to a contemplation of the verities which remained undefiled by a transient and secular horror. There can be no such escape to-day. What then? What are such men to do?

They do nothing. They mix with us, their familiar and friendly masks hiding scepticism we never question, for we do not know it is there; they do whatever task is theirs, but contribute to society nothing of the invention and energetic curiosity of the young. They appear to think it is not worth their while. They write, when they are poets, such verses as "Waste Land." At an hotel table in a provincial city, a noisy city in which nearly all the evidence of its historic past has been replaced by the architectural moods of

bricklayers in slack moments, a young man placed himself opposite to me, after a little hesitation. But there was nowhere else for him to go. We had the small table to ourselves. He saw that I was interested in a picture over the fireplace which represented a painter's idea of the heroic Canadians when they were at Vimy. "What do you think of it?" he asked, and smiled. I knew that this was a moment for caution.

"Don't let us think of it now," I said.

"No," he gently persisted. "But do you suppose it was like that?"

It was easy to assure him, at least, that I was not quite such a fool. "I was there," he confessed. But he disagreed with me when I spoke with regret of the trials of the young in those days.

"You exaggerate them," he said. "They did not feel it so keenly. Anyhow, I did not." Then I asked him to regard the difference in our ages. That fact would have made a difference in the impression given by such scenes. It would have been natural for me to be reflective, while watching youth entering the flames, and not returning.

He was silent for a while. "I see," he said. "I must say that only now am I beginning to feel the matter at all. It worries me a bit now. I suppose I am reflecting at last. The more I look at things, the less I like them. Disappointed, I suppose. I see why the war came, and why wars may be endless. People are so violent in mind. Besides, they have no clear reason for anything they do. In all this city there is not an idea behind most of its activities which is worth looking at. It isn't good enough. There is no taste in it for me."

"There is the church," I suggested. "A noble old building that."

He glanced quickly at me to see what I was after, but I gave him no sign. He made a bread pill. "Yes," he said, "I suppose so. There is the church," and tipped the pill towards the salt-cellar.

CHAPTER XXI

When youth informs us, and not with the emphasis of angry complaint but in weary indifference, while flicking a bread pill, that what we have accomplished will not bear looking at, and that we seem unable to devise anything better, or to desire it; and when the intellectual, without troubling to answer us at all, goes into a corner to chant "Hollow Men" to his own kind for their amusement, out of our hearing, perhaps our infelicity lies even nearer the heart than the gravity of the public speeches of the chairman of banks and shipping combines seem to show. For the first time in our history, after stimulating youth with exalted words to a full abnegation and sacrifice at the sacred altar of the State, we allowed the truth to be exposed. While yet the blood of sacrifice was running, it was shown that the altar was not maintained, after all, over the precious relics of saints and heroes, but over moneylenders' bonds and securities. That truth, we will not deny, is of serious moment to

the lenders, for we have heard of the sanctity of contracts. But contracts are not martyrs. What are such sanctities to young men? They cannot live for tapes and sealing-wax alone. Why, they ask, put an altar, anyhow, over that truck?

That is their mind. They do not care for what we have done, nor for what we wish to do; a feature of this new day which must be accounted as significant as is the excess of our imports over our exports. We may guess that it is not always easy for mankind to recognise the end of one of its eras and the beginning of another age. We are never quick to see that a customary idea may be waiting to go with the old hat. In the *Observer* for the 9th April 1826, it was reported: "The *Enterprise* steamboat arrived at Calcutta in perfect safety, after a passage of 113 days from Falmouth. This first attempt at steam navigation between Great Britain and India is a complete failure as to the saving of time, and it will become a question as to how far this mode of conveyance is preferable to the old mode of sailing. A decided proof, however, has been given of the application of steam to voyages, however long or dangerous."

That was but a century ago. This year, when visiting again a west country port frequented by coasting vessels, I found but one sailing craft moored to its quay. In other years it was difficult to find a berth for a newcomer. From across the water the face of that village used to be masked by spars and rigging. The neighbouring shipyards were noisy with mallets all day before the war. The ships to-day, a fleet of them, are in another place there, on the tidal saltings, where they are being broken down. This year the sailors, riggers, and shipwrights of the hamlet are employed as navvies, and are furnishing holiday-makers with new motor roads in the country. Only the local distributor of the dole is in what appears to be a permanent office, and he has his own car, for he has much to do.

There are signs enough that we are in an age of transition. The war not only quickened the flowering of revolutionary inventions, but gave us new things before we had learned the best use to make of the old ones ; and when the use for war purposes of the later inventions was past, we could not guess in what way they could be applied to the arts of peace. The evolution of

machinery was hastened by wit which worked feverishly in the abnormal air of battle, yet now those perfected things add but to the anxieties of men who find this world so unlike the old that enterprise along the accustomed paths would prove disastrous. For that reason many of our men of business will suffer now for their old contempt for education and the things of the mind. Their interests were sufficient once, though narrow. They were intent but on their machinery, which rotated profitably with no more skilled attention than the flood-tide of prosperity demanded. There was no call to curiosity in the indeterminate spiritual changes in the world. Literature for them was the easy drama which filled the hours between dinner and bed. Science, when it had anything useful to offer, could be bought. Education was high rates and taxes, and so certainly required a critical attention which, unfortunately, they could maintain only in intermittent indignation.

The almost imperceptible trend of the currents of speculation in religion, the arts, and the laboratories, quiet forces moving to change the opinions and needs on which commerce would depend for its health, would have exacted an

informed attention that men of affairs were too busy to allow from their important hours. Yet now, like a certain shipowning peer, hurriedly they suggest a dictator who could take charge of us, do what Parliament is unable to do, and transfigure into beauty that wreckage produced by confident folly with the magic of a little peremptory bullying. That simple remedy for the outcome of evil is just the suggestion which would spring, a natural weed, from the mental compost formed during the passing of long hours in office. Even the contemptible intellectuals ought not to laugh at it. It is no joke. Moses, when for his thirsty multitude he conjured water from a dry rock with a wand, had a task which our dictator, if ever he should try his conjuring on us, will look upon with envy as a simple trick.

It is not that our industry and commerce show many signs that they cannot revive. They could, of course, but they will not do so under the incantations of the old catchwords. Catchwords, which busy men find easy and soothing, and think are stimulating, never do anything but make the obvious memorable. And what once was obvious in business affairs has lost much

of its principle; the old soothing phrases no longer correspond to the new inherencies. We may say, for instance, that the fleets of but a few of our largest shipping companies exceed in tonnage and excel in quality the whole merchant marine of some other important nations. That is true. Though the rate of increase of tonnage under the Red Ensign has not been so great as that under other flags, yet the increase has been sufficient. The tonnage of British liners and cargo steamers running to schedule along the chief sea routes, the most important service to a maritime nation, is far greater than that of any foreign merchant ensign. No other flag at present appears likely to compete in equal tonnage and with ships as good against a service so cleverly arranged and so faithful to its contracts.

The British merchant fleet, in fact, is where it was before the war. But new factors are beginning to qualify the problem of the maintenance of the Red Ensign. It is not a matter so simple as it used to be to order no more than a new ship. In Lloyd's Register for 1914 there were 297 motor-ships of 234,287 gross tons. In 1925 there were 2145 vessels of

2,714,073 tons. More than half the tonnage now on the ways is of motor-ships. Yet, though the motor-ship may be the ship of the future, its present advantages over the steamship are qualified by the price of coal and some technical matters which do not concern laymen, though they make a problem onerous enough for an Atlantic company when considering a new liner. Some foreign nations, however, and Italy notably, appear to have no doubt that the motor-ship should replace the steamship, because, for one reason, that would make Italian shipowners independent of British coal.

Invention gives industry the power to dispense with more and more of that army of craftsmen and labourers upon which it once depended. The motor-ship, of which engineers complain that she is too cold down below, needs but a quarter of the number of attendants compelled by furnaces and steam-engines. With new deck-gear for loading and discharging, and able to bunker through a pipe, she will make the old song, "My father 'e's a fireman," as quaint as a Napoleonic lullaby. And ships can be even steered to-day without a quartermaster. The gyro-compass and the gyro-pilot and such in-

ventions are reducing a ship to a complicated but inevitable automaton.

Yet with all the surprising contrivances by which production is quickened and multiplied, and that reduce ships to automata responsive to the finger-touches of a few experts, the problems of the British manufacturer and shipowner are far from solved. Shipping is what is known as a finishing industry. The ship is but the last implement applied to trade. Now, the war shook many distant peoples out of their old habits. A reliance upon the British factory and mine was broken. For the first time since our factories began to smoke, many foreign people had to do for themselves what the British had always done for them. The Red Ensign ceased to make its regular and fore-ordained appearances.

In a measure to-day those people do not want our help. They have learned to do without it. The greed of our sellers of coal, when coal rose to £15 a ton at Genoa, drove the Italians to convert their rivers into power. South America began the manufacture of articles which formerly kept machinery running in our Midlands. Other countries were forced to establish plant for making steel. The East turned to the spinning

and weaving of cotton. The number of cotton spindles in Japan, China, India, and Brazil, in 1913, was 10,000,000. They had nearly doubled by 1924. The annual production of steel in Japan, China, India, and Australia in the year before the war was 360,000 tons. In 1922 it was 858,000 tons. Australia is endeavouring to dispense with Bradford woollens. When the war ended, not only were national credits in ruins, and folk everywhere poorer, but new facts were established in commerce and industry. Dependent folk in the remotest countries had had their wits animated and their old loyalties changed.

While Europe was busy draining its chosen young life into the mud, the centre of the world's gravity shifted across from the eastern to the western hemisphere. America became the creditor and the dictator of financial rulings. And while after the peace settlement the barriers to trade in Central and South-eastern Europe were multiplied ecstatically through the increase in the number of authorities entitled to hinder their neighbours with tariffs and prohibitions, the various States which make the American Republic were still free of tariff bars. Over

there a continent works as one nation. But unluckily Europe, though with its knowledge, ancient culture, traditional arts and crafts, its means of quick communication, and its richness of variety, could quite easily meet the competition of America, is hampered by feuds, fears, and frontiers which make her outlook as lightsome as the cobwebbed windows of an attic on a November afternoon. She is held and frustrated by the infatuations of her past. It is time her various national emotions and sentiments, though decorative, should be relegated to her museums, unless she wishes to make a gift to America of what humanity owes to her past endeavours.

CHAPTER XXII

It may afford pleasurable stimulation to the Latin, who seems perennially light-headed and boobyish, to listen to the sonorous drums and brass-ware of nationalism, and to play with the idea of the Mediterranean as an "inland Italian lake." But a nation, like a child, may grow out of its notions, and forget them. It is doubtful whether the very Pacific, as an inland British pond, would satisfy the doubt felt by our own people. They have gone beyond hearing of Kipling's war chants. They would be unmoved by the gift of the whole of Africa as another glorious burden. That kind of renown is with the scalp-hunters and has no more fascination for us than the butcher's block in the Tower of London.

We have not reasoned it out, but we know the rule of Asiatics and other coloured people by white men is drawing to a close. If those people show favour to any of the whites in future, it will not be because of superior

bombing planes and naval bases. We shall have to display something better than uniforms and Dreadnoughts. The Italians, who are suffering a passing enchantment under the obsolete words of conquest and dominion, could no more hold India down than Vesuvius. When China becomes a republic, and docile Java and the little islands of Indonesia have their cinematograph halls and branches of a communistic society, of what benefit is it to sit looking at colourful Imperial oleographs? This would not be worth mentioning, but we have our heedless folk at home who never notice a change in the sky till the storm catches them in the open.

Here we are, but just emerged, raw and bewildered, from a catastrophe—hardly out of it yet, in fact—which was of far greater moment to Europe than the overthrow of Rome by the men from the North. It has made the foundations of our State unsafe, played havoc with traditions even in the Far East, changed spiritual values, and broken the idols in most of the temples. And yet mankind, in the midst of the forlorn litter of downfall, doubting now the august powers in which once it trusted, appears certain, at least, of one thing. The priest, the statesman,

and the soldier have failed it; yet we see that the poet with his dream of beauty, and the savant with his dream of truth, as though they were celestials, might have been above the storm, and untouched by it. We may not consider that queer exemption to be of any moment, but its strangeness attracts the attention. It prompts in us the idea, very unreasonably, that perhaps only a simple word, if it could be found, would put the world on a right course, for it may be not prosperity we want so much as another attitude of mind. If we could find that simple word, it might be easy to judge the depth of America's misfortune with most of Europe's gold in its coffers and prosperity leering on its shoulders like an incubus. Once England was as fortunate; yet what was the use of defiantly reckoning the tons of our ships when the children of the slums would have shamed a Kafir kraal? If we could begin to burn our old pride and lumber, as a sign and a light to our neighbours, it might serve them better than our coal and steel. What are goods? We want fresh definitions.

A poet, when I told him something of this, pointed in bitterness to a promiscuous bookstall.

He showed me what was there. It was what the public wanted.

But what of that? Let us welcome all readers, excepting only those who read to find more reasons for hating their neighbours; and let poets and others who are peculiar in their reading and not easy to please rejoice because in the universal pollenation of souls by the alphabet there will be those here and there who presently will show they are the children of light. A hasty survey of a book-stall or a music shop would convince us that, for the people who support it, Mozart and Keats would prove as remote and strange as the Early Fathers.

It is true, of course, that frivolity, which may be a sign of desperation and weariness of the spirit, which we cannot blame, are getting every ministration from religion and the arts that their merits deserve. The more popular newspapers, too, would suggest that humanity lifts its head inquiringly to nothing but a suggestion of the drains. But are these signs of exceptional significance? Only the hasty would think so in their despair. We must agree that our own is a time of transition; a winter for humanity.

The outbreak of human energy which came towards the end of the eighteenth century, which produced the French Revolution, and which gave us Napoleon, Beethoven, Goethe, Clerk Maxwell, Dickens, and Darwin, has spent its force. The war was the end of it, and its natural end. The war was the consummation of the unresolved assurance and folly of that immensely creative phase of European history which went off on a steam-engine and ended in bombs on Piccadilly ; which out of a theory that the fittest should survive justified the immolation of its most promising and lively boys ; which never understood that the considered and subtle devices of its Chancelleries, designed to establish more firmly its dynasties and traditional sanctions, would end in releasing Lenin. The fecundity of that period was the cause of the disaster, for its busy people never paused to doubt the things they were so energetically amassing.

The great Victorian souls who were debating the origin and destiny of man and the office of God were too aloof to know of the children crawling naked in the galleries of the mines beneath their Areopagus of intellect. And we

cannot be absolutely confident that wrong, when done merely to the innocent and helpless, is done in a void. There is no telling what its infective power may be. Humanity agglomerated so much pride, wealth, and power, that all got beyond its control, for there was no union with justice, and over came the ornate but loose and unprincipled edifice. Now we sit, regretting the past, considering our mistakes though not quite knowing where they were made, and doing little more at present than sweat in fear of the darkness which is Russia. Our winter has come and we must live through its cold and threats. We would plan the future if only we knew which plan would prove quickening.

Is that future hopeful? But why should we be asked to say what the future will be, or anything else that has no existence? Yet we may say that not at the time of the French Revolution, for then men were fired with a terrible zeal and a wild and impossible hope, nor during the height of their industrial prosperity, for then they never doubted their god-like competence to control their destiny, were men so likely to come upon the truth, which is quiet and gracious, as

they are to-day. The Victorian years, with all their creativeness and fecundity, daunt us. We recognise the intellectual energy of that time; but it is not that which appals us. Despite that astonishing uplift of mental power, which we know we cannot equal, we are now encumbered with the consequences of its grim economic and political evils. It is terrifying to see that men may be so able and confident, yet so wrong. With less than the equipment of the Victorians, we think we have learned to build better than they, because ours is the experience of the forfeiture. Humility which follows an excess of confidence is of greater virtue than pride ignorant of the retribution it has ordained.

To-day's frivolities and levities, the aftermath of stress, are happier signs of health than the solemn arrogance which put its trust in weight and numbers, considered that strong men were great because the defeated never rose from the dead in retaliation, and thought bulk was a sign of vitality. We have learned to be less silly than that. The new anxiety to discover an evangel to light mankind out of the circuit of the deadly logic round which it has progressed from war

to war is a sign of a more enterprising and intelligent spirit than that of haughty greed with its stare fixed in monomania on a melodramatic vision of Empire.

Why, of late years we have heard even our politicians discuss, with shy but faintly truculent allusiveness, the Sermon on the Mount, in their concern for the privileges of strife and loot. To be quite fair to them, they did not discuss it, but dismissed it. Yet it is certain at least that our representative men must have heard of that piece of literature, or they could not have dismissed it as irrelevant and of disservice to national aims. We know now they are aware it exists. It does. It would be idle, therefore, to deny our progress. The Beatitudes are not practically helpful in politics and economics, if we would persist in attaining the things of our desire. They are and must be but expressions of useless piety to any priest blessing the emblems of worldly power, with piled drums for an altar, while reverent bombardiers stand about him. And yet, should the fearsome and unexpected human spirit become kindled, in a moment of madness, by the magic of those awful and nonsensical words, we cannot

tell what may happen to the altar of drums, to the hand of the bomb-maker, to the nature of our commerce, to the national temple dedicate to St Paul. Our affairs might go completely wrong.

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN BY NEILL AND CO., LTD., EDINBURGH.

VK57. T4 1926

a39001 005972719b

721